



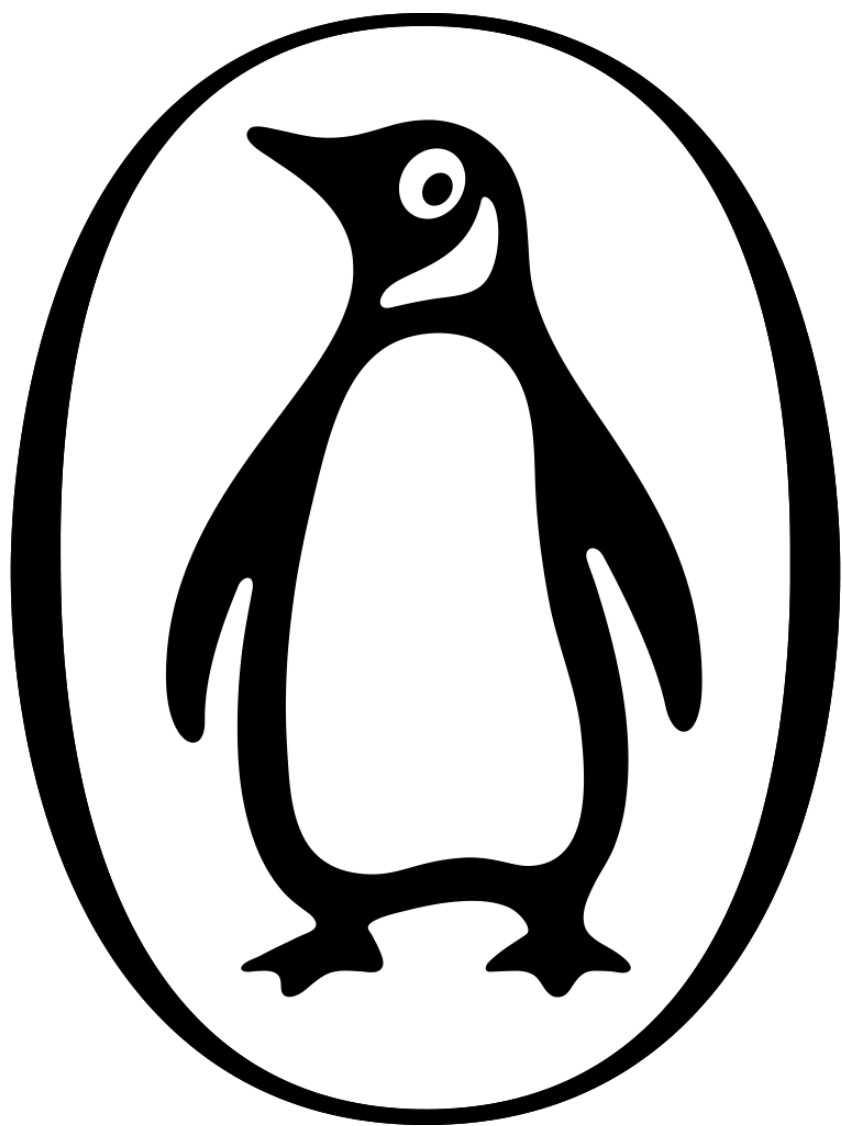
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The Desert Fathers

Sayings of the Early Christian Monks

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THE DESERT FATHERS

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The Desert Fathers

Sayings of the Early Christian Monks

Translated and with an Introduction by

BENEDICTA WARD

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11, Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Cnr Rosedale and Airborne Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published 2003

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EISBN: 9781101488485

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Introduction

The Mediterranean, the ‘sea among the lands’, was called in the ancient world ‘mare nostrum’, ‘our sea’, not only because it was the main means of communication but also because it provided the physical and cultural identity of the classical world: as Socrates said, ‘We live round the sea like ants and frogs round a pond.’¹ The same was true of the early church, founded in Jerusalem at the eastern end of ‘our sea’ but, expanding around it, especially after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, into the Mediterranean-centred world of the Roman Empire. Here, the southern coastline of the Mediterranean, that is, North Africa and especially Egypt, already major factors in Roman civilization as sources of both wealth and of learning, rapidly became of central importance for Christians. These areas produced major accounts of martyrdom such as that of Perpetua and Felicity,² engendered the first official heresy of Donatism,³ were the centre for the great enterprise of combining the Gospel of revelation with Greek philosophy,⁴ and also produced the dominant spiritual ideals of the ancient and medieval worlds in monasticism. Alongside Antioch and Rome, Alexandria was one of the three major Christian cities of the ancient world, with its great library and its patriarch, held to be the successor of Peter through his disciple Mark, and its tradition of links with Christ himself in the stories of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15). Here the words of the Gospel flourished, both in the towns and in the villages, forming an energetic and enterprising section of the Christian church.

Detachment from selfish concerns was always of the essence for Christianity. The invitation of Jesus to the young ruler, ‘Go, sell all that you have... and come and follow me’ (Luke 18:22) provided a central theme for Christians in the first three centuries; it was seen as the most direct way of discipleship, the surest way to learn what it meant to be with Jesus before the face of the Father. This sense of detachment from this world had also an eschatological dimension; the phrase ‘Maranatha, even so come, Lord Jesus’ (Rev. 22:20) was not a vague hope but an immediate and joyful expectation; ‘Let grace come and this world pass away,’ Christians said in their corporate prayer at the Eucharist.⁵ There were many ways in which Christians lived out the other-worldly focus expressed in the last verse of the New Testament, but one major way of living constantly in that expectation was by the physical withdrawal from worldly life of the monks: a

visitor to Egypt from Palestine wrote of the hermits there in the fourth century:

One can see them in the desert waiting for Christ as loyal sons watching for their father... There is only the expectation of the coming of Christ in the singing of hymns... There is no town or village in Egypt and the Thebaid which is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls.⁶

This idea of the immediate return of Christ and the end of the world was given a sharper edge by the fact of living in the first three centuries of the Christian era under the shadow of general disapproval and intermittent persecution. In the Roman Empire Christians were not admired; they were called atheists because they did not worship the gods of the city, and therefore they lived on the edge of political society. The world-renouncing perspective of waiting for the coming of the Lord was maintained even under threat of death and found expression especially in the accounts of those who died rather than compromise.⁷ By the beginning of the third century this totality of commitment was seen also in the lives of ascetics, that is, those who undertook a poor and celibate life, lived daily and in detail in the light of the cross of Christ in the expectation of the coming of the Lord. These men and women were not trying to adopt the way of life professionally called 'monastic'; rather, they naturally lived in a way that set them free to wait in expectation of entering into, like the apostles and martyrs, the full life of the Spirit of God.

At first this was done in the urban centres of Christianity, but gradually a need for a more absolute retirement for this way of life caused people to seek places of solitude away from social, political and economic demands. This was given a further impetus with the end of persecution at the beginning of the fourth century under the first Christian emperor, Constantine, when the church, as a recognized and legal institution, began to turn world-forsaking Christians into respectable citizens of this world. Many who found the new ways of Christian life alien knew themselves called to continue to live in an eschatological dimension that they could now only find outside the cities. The places especially used in this way were the deserts of Syria, Palestine and above all Egypt.⁸ Here earnest and devoted Christians were apart from the immediate demands of society, family and church organization; even the duties of care for the poor, the sick, and the needy were at a remove from their daily life. They were free to concentrate most of all on exploring the motives of conduct and thought within themselves so that what was disordered could be brought to light and redeemed by encounter with the forgiveness of God. Instead of dealing with the manifestations of evil in daily life, they were concerned with the source of sin in the human heart. Since

they were considered to be representatives of all creation, it was this aspect of their lives which caused them to be regarded as intercessors for all humanity.

The early Christian ideal of standing where Christ stands was gradually combined with a much older and essentially dualist way of life, common to all religions, that is, the way of the monk, the *monos*, 'the one', who lived not in company with another but alone before God. Thus there emerged in the third, fourth and fifth centuries a Christian version of the ancient form of religious life known as monasticism. These new monks combined the early ways of Christianity with similar monastic practices such as life-long celibacy, fasting, solitude, silence, vigil, prayer and poverty. It is these men and women who have become known as the 'desert fathers', as distinct from the early Christian theologians who were known as 'fathers of the church'. It is a term which suggests that their influence was as vital to Christian life as the theology of the 'fathers' but that it grew out of the desert and solitude, rather than out of the debates of councils and bishops.

These men and women lived alone as hermits, or with disciples living near by, or, as training became more urgent, in larger groups in monasteries. At the beginning this was a way of life largely unstructured by theological reflection. These people were ordinary Christians who chose to live out their evangelical commitment in terms of the monastic way of life, and in doing so they transformed both Christianity and monasticism in both its details and its ideology. Most of the first Christian monks in Egypt were neither clerics nor scholars; they were laymen, uneducated peasants, like Apollo who was a shepherd, or itinerant traders like Macarius, though there were also some, like the Roman nobleman Arsenius and the scholar Evagrius, who were learned in the classics and sophisticated in behaviour.⁹

Living in solitude, or with a few companions, the desert fathers, whatever their background, undertook a lifestyle of great simplicity. They did not at first wear a specifically monastic dress but rather the ordinary clothes of a working man in Egypt. Some lived in caves, others built small bare huts for themselves, out of sight of one another but within reasonable reach of water. There they meditated on as much of the Bible as they knew by heart, especially the psalms, absorbing it through memory into their physical being and exploring themselves in its light more deeply all the time. They undertook simple repetitive tasks such as rope-making or basket-weaving, so that they could earn their living without distraction and not have to leave their cells. This stability of remaining in one place was a vital part of their asceticism: 'Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything' they said.¹⁰ Sometimes a newcomer would live near a

more experienced monk, or three or four might live as a group; in some parts of Egypt, larger groups were formed round a well-respected guide, and these evolved a corporate life of liturgical prayer, work and shared meals. After the first generation had died, there was an increasing need for this kind of group monasticism, with explicit teaching and training for newcomers, care for the old and a more clearly formulated external organization and discipline that developed into the great religious houses of the monastic tradition.

The desert fathers saw themselves as poor men, as sinners in need of mercy, as those who were not strong enough to endure the friction of worldly life. But the hermits were seen by outsiders as holy men, nearer to heaven than earth, and therefore available as intercessors: as a visitor wrote, 'These are they by whom the world is kept in being.'¹¹ What visitors to Egypt most noticed was that the hermits lived a life of physical hardship, which those who came from a more gentle world thought was beyond the capacity of most. Some of the monastic extremes of physical discipline, such as going to the limits of existence with as little sleep, food, drink and companionship as possible, were a cause for wonder, then and later, not always of a complimentary kind.¹² But undertaking dramatic feats of asceticism was not, in fact, the way of life favoured by the majority of the monks. In the enthusiasm of the first years they experimented with many kinds of ascetic practices, but they soon realized that detachment from self could be explored better by methods that were less extreme and could therefore be sustained. There is a story in this collection that shows the uninstructed enthusiasm of some and its relation to the general understanding of life, about two monks who understood literally the saying of Christ 'if your right hand offend you, cut it off' (Matt. 5:30). They therefore took the extreme step of castrating themselves. Thinking this was admirable, they asked for official approval from both bishops and monks and were dismayed when it was universally refused.¹³ Christianity in the desert was not about death but about new life. Moreover, the monks were careful to note that external ascetical practices might lead to the worst sin of all, pride, and they therefore judged it more prudent to shun external displays in favour of equally arduous but less dramatic ways of Christian living.

The picture that emerges from these primitive sources is of entirely, indeed ruthlessly, committed but sensible men and women, learning to live with nature and with others in a harmony that grew out of a prayed life, where the command of St Paul to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17) had gradually become the framework of each day and night. This centre of prayer to God affected their relationships with both the created world and other people. The natural world was not to them an area for sentimental or romantic self-indulgence but

the place where the presence of God was revealed through their new life in Christ. There are many stories in these collections about the good relationship of the hermits with animals, but these are not instances of sentimentality. They are rather part of a theology that saw the initial relationship of Adam with creation as disrupted by his sin, and here being restored in Christ, the second Adam, with the result that those who shared in the life of Christ could again name and control creation as its head. Typical of such stories is the account of how Macarius healed the blind cubs of a hyena, but extracted a promise from her not to kill sheep any longer,¹⁴ or of Bes, renowned for his gentleness to all creation but who when a hippopotamus ravaged the district asked it politely to go somewhere else.¹⁵ The animals encountered were at times described under the poetic images of the classical world, which suggests that redemptive love extended back into the past. Antony the Great encountered two such creatures on his way to visit the hermit Paul:

He caught sight of a creature who was half man and half horse, to which the poets have given the name of Hippocentaur. At the sight of it he protected himself by making the life-giving sign on his own forehead, and said, 'Hey you, where does the servant of God live?' The creature... indicated a desire for friendly communication. Stretching out his right hand he indicated the route that Antony was seeking.

In the next valley Antony met a weeping fawn, who brought him food and asked for his prayers: Antony also wept for wonder that the light of Christ had touched these creatures with new life and glory.¹⁶

With the created world the hermits were firm and reverent but with themselves they were unrelentingly severe since they knew, none better, their own weaknesses:

When Cyrus of Alexandria was asked about the temptation of lust, he said, 'If you are not tempted, you have no hope; if you are not tempted, it is because you are sinning. The man who does not fight sin at the stage of temptation is sinning already in his body. The man who is sinning in his flesh has no trouble from temptation.'¹⁷

There was no gentleness about the conduct of their own lifestyle but their approach to others was different. They believed always in the sincerity of the commitment of each one and therefore behaved to each other in ways that would help and encourage them in the life they had chosen. If there was failure or weakness in anyone, it was at once understood that this was not what that person really desired, and therefore the weak were not blamed but encouraged to start again. Above all, they did not judge one another:

They said of Macarius the Great that he became as it is written a god upon earth, because just as God protects the world, so Macarius would cover the faults which he

saw, as though he did not see them, and those which he heard, as though he did not hear them.¹⁸

When some monks planned to discipline a brother who was guilty of sin, they were reminded of this basic rule of non-judgement by the acted parable of one of the most loved and respected of the hermits:

They assembled the brothers, and sent a message to Moses telling him to come. But he would not come. Then the presbyter sent again saying, 'Come, for the gathering of monks is waiting for you.' Moses got up and went. He took with him an old basket which he filled with sand and carried it on his back. They went to meet him and said, 'What does this mean, abba?' He said, 'My sins run out behind me and I do not see them and I have come here today to judge another.'¹⁹

Their love for each other therefore was expressed in leaving each other free for their chosen way of life, though even at times admitting ruefully that this distancing was not easy. Curiosity about each other could get the better of them, as, for instance, when two rather delicate young men came asking to live as monks in a cell near Macarius. When he talked about them later, he said that he had reluctantly agreed to help them with bare necessities only, thinking this would test and discourage them, but 'they with patience did all that I had told them and for three years they did not come to see me.' Macarius, telling the story against himself, was overcome with curiosity about these independent strangers: 'I wrestled with my thoughts, thinking, what is their way of life? Why do they not come to ask me about their thoughts?' and in the end he went to visit them to see what they were doing.²⁰

The life was hard and temptation severe, but when as a young monk Moses thought he could endure it no longer, Isidore whom he consulted did not suggest that he abandoned or alleviated his chosen way of life; instead:

He took him out on the terrace and said to him, 'Look towards the west'; he looked to the west and saw hordes of demons flying about and making a noise before launching an attack. Then he said, 'Look towards the east'; he turned and saw an innumerable multitude of holy angels shining with glory. Isidore said, 'Those who are with us are more in number than those that are against us.'²¹

The desert fathers showed by simple but practical living that the gospel is both true and real, not intellectually difficult or for a rich or clever select few, but open for all who in sincerity wanted it. The stories about women who had been prostitutes and had been converted and then lived the rest of their lives in the desert as penitents especially illustrated this fact.²² In particular the story of Mary of Egypt, a prostitute for many years in Alexandria, who

changed her life completely and lived alone in the deserts of Palestine with no help or counsel of any sort, showed the possibilities open to anyone willing to respond to the call of God. In later versions of this collection, the story of the prostitute Thais was sometimes included to illustrate this fact.²³

Another aspect of their choice of lifestyle was the desire of the hermits to be without material possessions and so freed from self and capable of charity towards all. When Arsenius was told that a relation had died and made him his heir he wanted to tear up the will, saying 'I was dead long before this senator who has just died'.²⁴ Again and again, outsiders who wanted to alleviate the simplicity and austerity of their way of life found no one ready to receive the money or goods offered. Thieves were therefore no threat, partly because the hermits had nothing worth stealing but also because they wanted to have less not more:

When Macarius was living in Egypt, one day he came across a man who had brought a donkey to his cell and was stealing his possessions. As though he was a passer-by who did not live there, he went up to the thief and helped him to load the beast, and sent him peaceably on his way, saying to himself, 'We brought nothing into this world (1 Tim. 6:7) but the Lord gave; as he willed, so it is done: blessed be the Lord in all things.'²⁵

Life in the desert was austere and relentlessly harsh but the hermits' attitude was not one of grim endurance. There is a vein of humour in these stories, some of it unconscious but some of it deliberate, as, for instance, in the account of the two brothers who lived without quarrelling:

Two hermits lived together for many years without a quarrel. One said to the other, 'Let's have a quarrel with each other, as is the way of men.' The other answered, 'I don't know how a quarrel happens.' The first said, 'Look here, I put a brick between us, and I say, That's mine. Then you say, No, it's mine. That is how you begin a quarrel.' So they put a brick between them, and one of them said, 'That's mine.' The other said, 'No; it's mine.' He answered, 'Yes, it's yours. Take it away.' They were unable to argue with each other.²⁶

Moses the Black, who came from a different part of Africa, was one of the most revered of the hermits; he was a warm and loving man and the affection in which he was held was expressed at times by teasing him about the colour of his skin; he returned these comments with no resentment but with good humour: 'Black outside', he would say, 'but white inside.' When a party of visitors criticized a hermit, thinking the generous welcome he had given them suggested that he always lived like that, he gave them a message to the next hermit they were to visit saying, 'Do not water the vegetables,' with the result that their next

host made no preparation for them, and they soon found the ordinary way of hermit life there beyond what they could stand.²⁷ Even Antony the Great knew that relaxation matters especially within a severe way of life:

A hunter happened to come by and saw Antony talking in a relaxed way with the brothers, and he was shocked. The hermit wanted to show him how we should sometimes be less austere for the sake of the brothers, and said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow, and draw it.' He did so, and Antony said, 'Draw it further' and he drew it further. He said again, 'Draw it yet further,' and he drew it some more. Then the hunter said to him, 'If I draw it too far, the bow will snap.' Antony answered, 'So it is with God's work. If we always go to excess, the brothers quickly become exhausted. It is sometimes best not to be rigid.'²⁸

When Poemen was asked how he dealt with any brother who fell asleep during public prayer, he replied, 'I put his head upon my knees and help him to rest.'²⁹

The fame of the desert fathers spread rapidly and visitors came to see this wonder. This presented a problem for those who had chosen solitude and here the stories show their prudence and common sense in receiving the ones who came. Serious visitors would be received and helped but inquisitive tourists would be urged to go elsewhere. It was no use receiving the world into the hermitage when to do so would destroy it. It is here that the humility of the hermits was most prominent; they fled from praise and attention as from fire because pride, the self-consciousness that undermines simplicity, was their chief enemy. Their external asceticism was what attracted notice, but such things could be achieved by human or even diabolical effort; that was not the inner essence of their life:

Macarius was once returning to his cell from the marsh carrying palm-leaves. The devil met him by the way, with a sickle, and wanted to run him through with it but he could not. The devil said, 'Macarius, I suffer a lot of violence from you, for I can't overcome you. For whatever you do, I do also. If you fast, I eat nothing; if you keep watch, I get no sleep. There is only one quality in which you surpass me.' Macarius said to him, 'What is that?' The devil answered, 'Your humility; that is why I cannot prevail against you.'³⁰

The same humble self-deprecation was evident in their attitude to extraordinary gifts of prayer. They had very little to say about visions and wonders, and indeed rejected them outright:

The devil appeared to a monk disguised as an angel of light, and said to him, 'I am the angel Gabriel, and I have been sent to you.' But the monk said, 'Are you sure you weren't sent to someone else? I am not worthy to have an angel sent to me.' At that the devil vanished.³¹

These hermits were not aiming at or expecting mystical experience in this world as a result of their efforts. They followed a specific path of self-knowledge in the light of God that would lead them eventually into the redeemed life of the friends of God, only fully realized after death. They were engaged in the work of prayer and self-knowledge, and were not concerned with either the service of others or with the sacramental life of the church. They resisted ordination for fear of conceit; those monks who were unwillingly ordained might choose never to exercise their ministry at all.³² Though they all knew the Bible by heart and made it the basis of their meditation, the majority could not read or write and those who could learned to be cautious about relying on this ability in any way that would make them despise others or neglect the interiority of the Scriptures. They affirmed that it was the content of the Gospel that they were to practise; they were not to be distracted by a learning that stayed with the surface meaning and might encourage them to both possessiveness and boastfulness. The well-educated Arsenius was questioned about his habit of consulting the simple Egyptian peasant-monks:

‘How is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education ask this peasant about your thoughts?’ He replied, ‘I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.’³³

Their work was to live in stillness and know themselves thoroughly, so that the redemption of Christ might come upon their whole lives from beginning to end; they would live therefore at the limits of nature, and of human endurance, because of the glory ahead of them; and it is in this positive perspective that their asceticism is best understood. They did not talk, not because they hated conversation, but because they wanted to listen intently to the voice of God in silence; they did not dislike eating, but were feeding on the Word of God so that they did not have room for earthly food or time to bother with it; they did not avoid company because it bored them, but, as one of them said, ‘I cannot be with you and with God.’³⁴ It was not a dislike of sleep that made them keep vigil, but an eager and longing attitude of waiting for the coming of Christ:

On Saturday evening preparing for the glory of Sunday, Arsenius would turn his back on the sun and stretch out his hands in prayer towards heaven till once again the sun shone on his face.³⁵

Living at the limits of the use of clothing, shelter, food and drink, the hermits needed very little. They chose to do simple repetitive work in their cells, such as weaving baskets, and the results were sold in the villages in return for the bare essentials of life in the harsh

desert. This sense of living at the limits extended to their prayer towards God for mankind. They were living on the boundaries between human and animal, between the cultivated lands and the wilderness, between angels and men, which made them mediators with God for all creation. It is in this perspective that it is possible to understand an extremist such as Simon Stylites, who stood for years on top of a pillar, suspended between heaven and earth, a living icon of the place of the monk as part of the intercession of Christ.³⁶

The bright vigour and delight of the early days of the first monks was in fact circumscribed; the end of the monastic way of life in Egypt came with the attacks of nomadic tribesmen from the western desert, known as Mazices, who from 407 onwards devastated Egypt. But the ideal of the hermit-life, whether lived out alone or near others, had already spread away from the Mediterranean into northern Europe, through both written and verbal accounts of visitors to the hermits, leading to the formation of groups of monks as well as hermits. Both the difference of climate and of political ethos caused adaptations of the practical way of life for the northern monks, but the calling remained the same.

The influence of the hermits did not remain only within the context of monasteries themselves. Monasticism was a major influence in shaping European society and because the roots of its spirituality were to be found in the early days of Egyptian experimentation, medieval Christendom inherited an attraction for the desert. The desert fathers' stories and sayings were recorded in the fourth century as a special but vital aspect of Christian life in the early church. They were widely read and the influence of these texts could be dramatic. For instance, in the year 386 a young man was talking with some companions in a private garden in Milan, when visitors arrived who described how two of their friends in the Imperial Civil Service had left the world recently in order to become monks after reading about the way of life of Antony of Egypt, the most famous of the desert fathers. Unspeakably moved, their host left them, and, as he wrote later:

I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to tears... all at once I heard the singsong voice of a child, 'Take it and read it, take it and read it'... I opened the book of the Scriptures and read the first passage my eye fell on, for I had heard the story of Antony, and I remembered how he happened to go into a church while the Gospel was being read and taken it as a counsel addressed to himself when he heard the words, 'Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor and come and follow me.'³⁷

He exclaimed, 'What is the meaning of this story? These men have none of our education and yet they stand up and storm the gates of heaven'.³⁸ In this way, the story of an uneducated Egyptian peasant

farmer and his adoption of solitude in the desert for life proved the turning point in the conversion of Augustine, the formative theologian of Europe.

Augustine was not alone in being deeply affected by stories from the deserts of Egypt. Jerome, Paula, Melania and Rufinus visited the Egyptian hermits before imitating their way of life in Bethlehem, and Postumianus claimed to have been there before returning to Tours and the monastery of St Martin. Most of those who either saw the hermits or read about them were positively impressed, but there were others who were astonished but appalled: Rutilius Namantianus, for instance, wrote of a friend who had gone into the desert as:

Driven by the furies out from men and lands,
A credulous exile skulking in the dark
Thinking, poor fool, that heaven feeds on filth.³⁹

But the attraction of the radical simplicity of response to God in the desert continued to move and inspire; by 300, in the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus alone there were said to be ‘ten thousand monks and twenty thousand nuns’.⁴⁰ The desert, they said, had become a city because of the number of the monks living there. After the fourth century the texts describing early hermits and monks circulated widely and were constantly referred to as wisdom both well known and reliable. To take a few instances at random: in the sixth century, the Rule of St Benedict, the monastic pattern most followed in Western Europe, referred explicitly to the traditions of the *Sayings of the Fathers* and the *Conferences* of Cassian as the basis for monastic life.⁴¹ When in the eighth century Felix wrote the life of the Anglo-Saxon hermit Guthlac of Crowland, he not only relied upon the *Life of St Antony* in describing Guthlac but attributed his way of life to having ‘read about the solitary life of monks of former days’, and in writing about Guthlac’s temptations he made the devils refer to ‘those famous monks who inhabited Egypt’. Guthlac was ‘walking with Christ’ like Arsenius, Macarius and Antony.⁴² A contemporary of Guthlac, Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, after a long apprenticeship in a monastery and in a diocese, embraced with simple joy the solitude of hermit life on the island of Farne, where the sea replaced the sands of the first monks as his ‘desert’.⁴³ In the twelfth century, in his letter to Heloise advising her and her sisters about monastic life, Peter Abelard quoted extensively from the *Sayings*,⁴⁴ while William St Thierry could find no greater praise for the twelfth century Cistercian monastic reforms than to compare them to the desert fathers.⁴⁵ The Middle English text of the *Ancrene Wisse*, written in the twelfth century for the use of a group

of women living together in solitude, is filled with quotations from desert texts.⁴⁶

It is astonishing to realize how this literature, now over one and a half thousand years old, has had a continuing influence far beyond the world in which it was first created. One of the most familiar phrases for late medieval devotion was 'Naked to follow the naked Jesus';⁴⁷ it resounds with all the personal piety of the fifteenth century. But this phrase was not first used in the ethos of Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of the Common Life, but by one of the most austere of the fourth century fathers of the church, Jerome, writing to the desert monk Rusticus from his cell in Bethlehem, after a lifetime spent in the midst of the world of early desert monasticism.⁴⁸ This is very often the case: a story or saying that seems entirely appropriate to the medieval or modern setting where it is used, can often be found among the sayings and stories of these first Christian monks. The story told, for instance, in this collection about the monk who woke up his dozing brothers by introducing secular gossip into his theological discourse to them, leads straight to the same story told by a Cistercian abbot in the thirteenth century; the only difference is that there the secular matter the abbot spoke of was King Arthur and his knights.⁴⁹ Again the story told here of the Protestant-minded monk who did not believe in the real presence of Christ under the forms of bread and wine and needed to be shown the truth by a vision of a child slain on the altar seems to belong to the thirteenth century and the disputes about transubstantiation, but is in fact centuries older.⁵⁰ This continuity suggests both the profound influence of these texts and also their continuing adaptability, although they emerged from a way of life that seems superficially the antithesis of the modern world.

In the twentieth century, many monastic reforms have referred back specifically to Egypt and the desert fathers. As well as the continued monastic interest in this material from the desert, these *Sayings* have been translated into many languages and continue to provide spiritual nourishment far beyond the cloister.⁵¹ They have inspired poetry, drama, opera and art as well as withdrawal into solitude and prayer. The facts that these early monks were living on the fringes both of civilization and of the institutional church, that they were not scholars or clerics, wealthy or with positions in society but just ordinary people who were sincerely concerned to live out their understanding of the Gospel, are perhaps what make them so universally popular. This is material which has in it an air of eternity, making it available to anyone; as Antony the Great said:

(some) leave home and cross the seas in order to gain an education, but there is no need for us to go away on account of the Kingdom of God nor need we cross the sea

in search of virtue. For the Lord has told us, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' All that is needed for goodness is that which is within, the human heart.⁵²

NOTES

1. Plato, *Phaedo*, tr. by H. Tredennick, p. 90, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, Bollingen Series 71, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
2. 'The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity' in H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 106–32.
3. See W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A movement of protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
4. For an anthology of texts see *Alexandrian Christianity*, compiled by J. E. L. Oulton and H. Chadwick, London: SCM Press, 1954. For a general introduction see A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981. An older general discussion of the main theologians of Alexandria will be found in C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886.
5. *The Didache*, tr. J. B. Lightfoot, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976, p. 27.
6. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (hereafter *Lives*), tr. Norman Russell, introduction by B. Ward, London: Mowbray/Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981, p. 50.
7. For texts concerning martyrdom cf. H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, and 'The Letters of Ignatius', in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and tr. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912.
8. Syria: cf. Theodoret of Syrus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, tr. R. Price (with an excellent introduction), Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985. Palestine: for a general introduction see D. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966. Egypt: see vol. 2 of H. G. Evelyn-White, *Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn*, 3 vols., New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926–33.
9. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (hereafter *Sayings*), tr. B. Ward, London: Mowbray/Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975: Apollo, p. 31; Macarius, pp. 105–16; Arsenius, pp. 7–17; Evagrius, pp. 53–5.
10. This text, 2:9, p. 10.
11. *Lives*, p. 50.
12. For example, 'The deserts of the Thebais are now peopled by a race of wild yet submissive fanatics', E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the*

- Roman Empire*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981, ch. x, p. 425.
13. This text 15:88, pp. 167–9. Also *Sayings*, Macarius, 11, pp. 109–10.
14. *Lives*, Macarius, 15, p. 110.
15. *Lives*, Bes, 3, p. 66; *Sayings*, Macarius, 32, p. 113.
16. ‘The Life of Paul of Thebes by Jerome’, in *Early Christian Writings*, tr. C. White, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1998, pp. 78–9. See the cover illustration for a picture of this encounter.
17. This text, 5:5, p. 35.
18. *Sayings*, Macarius, 32, p. 134.
19. *Ibid.* Moses, 2, pp. 138–9.
20. *Ibid.* Macarius, 33, p. 135.
21. *Ibid.* Moses, 1, p. 138.
22. For an introduction to the accounts of these prostitutes, with translations of the texts and comments on them, see *Harlots of the Desert, A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (hereafter *Harlots*), B. Ward, London: Mowbray/Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987.
23. The story of Thais was sometimes included with this text in section 16, Patience; a translation can be found in *Harlots*, pp. 76–85.
24. *Sayings*, Arsenius, 29, p. 14.
25. This text, 16:6, pp. 171–2.
26. *Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*, tr. B. Ward, Oxford: SLG Press, 1975, No. 221, p. 60; this text, 17:22, p. 181.
27. This text, 10:97, p. 112.
28. *Sayings*, Antony, 13, pp. 3–4; this text, 10:2, p. 88.
29. *Ibid.*, Poemen, 92, pp. 179–80.
30. *Ibid.*, Macarius, 11, pp. 109–10; this text, 15:26, p. 155.
31. This text, 15:68, p. 164.
32. This text, 15:27, pp. 155–6.
33. *Sayings*, Arsenius 6, p. 8; this text, 15:7, p. 148.
34. *Ibid.* 13, p. 9; this text, 17:5, p. 176.
35. *Ibid.* Arsenius 30, p. 12; this text, 12:1, p. 130.
36. For Simon Stylites, cf. Theodoret, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, ch. 26, pp. 160–77.
37. St Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. William Watts, Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, bk 8, ch. 12, p. 463.
38. *Ibid.* ch. 8, p. 443.
39. Rutilius Namantianus, ‘De Reditu Suo’, 11, pp. 519ff. Tr. Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, Constable, 1936, p. 22.

40. *Lives*, p. 67.
41. *Rule of St Benedict*, tr. J. McCann, London: Sheed and Ward, 1976, ch. 73.
42. Felix, *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, ch. 24, p. 87.
43. Bede, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, ed. and tr. B. Colgrave, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940.
44. *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, tr. Betty Radice, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, pp. 84, 169, 188, 190, 192, 196, 201, 234, 254.
45. William of St Thierry, *Life of St Bernard of Clairvaux, Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. Migne, vol. 185, col. 247. Tr. C. Webb and A. Walker, London: Mowbray, 1960.
46. *Ancrene Wisse*, in *Anchoritic Spirituality*, tr. A. Savage and N. Watson, New York: Paulist Press, 1991, pp. 41–199.
47. See Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, tr. Leo Sherley-Price, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1952. It is interesting to note that Jerome's phrase is 'naked to follow the naked Christ' whereas the later version changed 'Christ' to 'Jesus', indicating a difference of theological emphasis from the following of Christ in His act of redemption to the following of Jesus as the man of Galilee.
48. Jerome, *Letters*, tr. F. A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954, Letter 75, 'Letter to Rusticus', p. 438.
49. This text, 11:18, p. 121. See Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, tr. H. von E. Scott and C. C. S. Bland, London: Routledge and Sons, 1929, vol. 1, bk 4, ch. 36, p. 233.
50. This text, 18:3, pp. 184–5.
51. There are modern translations of this material into French, German, Spanish, Romanian, Italian, Icelandic, Arabic, Chinese.
52. Athanasius, *Life of St Antony*, tr. Robert T. Meyer, London: Longmans Green, 1950, p. 37.

Further Reading

EDITIONS

The Latin text of this translation of *Vitae Patrum* Book V was edited by Heribert Rosweyde, 1615, 1617, 1628; it was reprinted, and is accessible in the edition of J. P. Migne *Patrologia Latina* (hereafter PL) vol. 73, cols. 851–1024. (Paris: 1860)

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism*, in Library of Christian Classics, vol. 12, pp. 13–181, London: SCM Press, 1958; this has an appendix expanding the text of Migne by reference to other manuscripts.

Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, pp. 81–185, London: Constable, 1936

RELATED TEXTS

Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources. Commentary and translation by Benedicta Ward, London: Mowbray/Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987(Part of Book 1 of *Vitae Patrum*, PL vol. 73, cols. 651–71)

The Lausiac History of Palladius, tr. R. T. Meyer, London: Longmans Green, 1965(Book 8 in *Vitae Patrum*, PL vol. 73, cols. 1065–1215)

The Lives of the Desert Fathers, tr. Norman Russell, with a monograph by Benedicta Ward, London: Mowbray/Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981 (Book 2 of *Vitae Patrum*, PL vol. 73, cols. 707–39)

Pachomian Koinonia, tr. A. Veilleux, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 3 vols., 1980–82

Sayings of the Desert Fathers, tr. Benedicta Ward, London: Mowbray/Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975(The Greek Alphabetical Series, *Patrologia Graecia* (hereafter PG) 65, cols. 71–440)

Wisdom of the Desert Fathers, tr. Benedicta Ward (Greek Systematic Series, part 1), Oxford: SLG Press, 1975

- The World of the Desert Fathers*, tr. Columba Stewart (Greek Systematic Series, part 2), Oxford: SLG Press, 1986
- Athanasius, *Life of St Antony*, tr. R. T. Meyer, London: Longmans, 1950, (PL vol. 73, cols. 125–93)
- Basil, *Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, tr. W. K. Lowther Clarke, London: SPCK, 1925
- John Cassian, *Institutes and Conferences*, tr. E. Gibson, 1894, Ante Nicene Fathers Series, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971
- , *Conferences*, tr. B. Ramsey, New York: Paulist Press, 1997
- , *Institutes*, tr. B. Ramsey, New York: Newman Press, 2000
- Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, tr. J. E. Bamberger, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1970

BACKGROUND

- Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000
- Douglas Burton-Christie, *The World in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993
- Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971
- ‘The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 61, pp. 80–101, 1971
- *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988
- Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968
- Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*, Oxford: Mowbrays, 1966
- Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993
- Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998
- H. G. Evelyn-White, *Monasteries of the Wadi ‘n Natrûn*, vol. 2, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932. An invaluable description of the geographical setting of the desert fathers.

A Note on the Text

The collection of material translated here from Latin is the earliest surviving source for contact with the monastic world of Egypt. It does not stand alone but conveys clearly the basic simplicity of the early days, but its transmission was not straightforward, and in order to understand it, it is necessary to see the other kinds of literature that surrounded it.

The Egyptian monastic patterns were very quickly known about through a remarkable series of writings that were copied and re-copied, read and re-read, translated, quoted, used as examples in sermons and known by heart for centuries. These consisted of five kinds of literature: first, there are accounts of individuals, such as the *Life of St Antony the Great* by Athanasius, the *Life of St Paul the Hermit* by Jerome, and the life and rule of St Pachomius; with these should be classed the immensely popular accounts of the lives of converted prostitutes such as St Mary of Egypt. Second, there are travel journals, accounts given by visitors who went to see and be edified by the hermits, for example the *Historia Monachorum*, which gives a description of a kind of pious sightseeing tour undertaken by seven monks from Bethlehem who travelled into Egypt in the fourth century. There are many similar accounts by other visitors, such as Postumianus from Gaul, Paula and Melania, the Roman matrons from Bethlehem, and Egeria, a nun from Spain. Accounts written by those who had lived for a period of time among the hermits are similar to these, such as that of Palladius, who wrote about his own life in Egypt for the benefit of Lausus the Chamberlain in the *Lausiac History*, or the influential *Institutes* and *Conferences* recorded by John Cassian and his companion Germanus after two prolonged visits to Egypt. Third, there are collections of letters of spiritual direction such as those of Antony and of Amoun, and from Palestine the large collection of the letters of Barsanufius and John. Fourth, there are more formal treatises, which began to explore the theology of monasticism, especially those works connected with Evagrius, Pseudo-Macarius and Cassian. But behind them all there are more simple and primitive records consisting of collections of remarks made by one monk to another, or brief descriptions of either what a monk was seen to do as he was unconsciously observed or what he did as a deliberately acted-out parable. Such material was remembered and repeated, elaborated and expanded, attributed to different people and places, and written down

in Syriac, Coptic, Greek and Latin. These are the ‘sayings of the desert fathers’ or ‘the lives of the desert fathers’ with which this translation is concerned (details of these works will be found in the list for Further Reading pp. [xxvi](#)–[xxviii](#)).

The ‘sayings’ survived and were transmitted in two main kinds of collections: the *Alphabetical Series* and the *Systematic Series*. In the *Systematic Series* the sayings were arranged around topics important to the monks of the desert. This could be used as a kind of interior propaganda, encouraging, teaching and also warning new monks by quoting the ways in which their predecessors had understood vital aspects of their way of life. The basic method of learning in the desert was not by instruction but by example. The young monk would live near an older, more experienced monk, not in order to be taught but in order to observe his conduct and learn from that; as they said, ‘do not be their legislator, be their example’. The actual remarks quoted are very often fragments of remembered wisdom offered on request to an individual, and can therefore at times seem contradictory if they are seen as general principles. The monks might ask one another for a ‘word’ (‘Speak a word, abba’ was a frequent request), and in a sense this form of communication was fundamental to the method of the desert. The comments of the monks that were offered were not pieces of general teaching but a few words that were regarded as a word from God to an individual, and they were received not as a starting point for debate, but as a sacrament to be lived by. The words were pondered over and absorbed in silence until they were understood with the whole person, not just with the intellect. The written form of the sayings was needed when the first age of monastic experimentation was at an end and the new monks did not know the great men of their past. Many of the same passages are also found in the *Alphabetical Series*, where they were arranged under the names of various well-known monks put in alphabetical order.

The Latin collection of sayings, the *Verba Seniorum*, translated here into English, is the most complete of the Latin collections and is earlier in date than any of the extant Greek collections. It was translated from a lost Greek source in the middle of the sixth century by Pelagius and John, a deacon and sub-deacon from Rome, and was massively influential not only in monasticism but in spirituality in general for the Middle Ages and beyond. It is this collection that was quoted again and again in sermons and treatises, and though the texts were altered in transmission to suit the needs of different audiences they retained their original message. This collection seems to be an amalgamation of the *Alphabetical Series* and *Systematic Series* described above, with each section set out under a heading introducing sayings about a theme as in the *Systematic Series*, but each section beginning

with sayings attributed to individual and named monks as in the *Alphabetical Series*; in each section also the passages towards the end are anonymous, not attributed to any specific person, as in the *Systematic Series*.

I have translated the text of the *Vitae Patrum* Book V in *Patrologia Latina* vol. 73, cols 855–1022, reprinted there by J. J. Migne from the text edited by Heribert Rosweyde and printed at Antwerp in 1615, as Books V and VI of the *Vitae Patrum*. This text is treated here as one book with eighteen sections. Earlier English translations include a selection by Helen Waddell in *The Desert Fathers*, and a fuller version by Owen Chadwick which forms the first part of *Western Asceticism*. Like all students of early monasticism, I am deeply indebted to Professor Chadwick's work and refer readers especially to the appendix to his translation of this text where he describes manuscript evidence unknown to Rosweyde and Migne.

Latin and English are very different languages and there has always been a tension between those who translate 'word by word' and those who prefer to do so 'sense by sense'. When Evagrius of Antioch translated Athanasius' *Life of St Antony* from Greek into Latin, he wrote thus about his method:

a literal translation made from one language to another conceals the meaning... I have tried to avoid this in translating as you requested the life of the blessed Antony and I have translated in such a way that nothing should be lacking from the sense although something may be missing from the words. Some people try to capture the syllables and letters, but you must seek the meaning. ('The Life of St Antony' in *Early Christian Lives* tr. Carolinne White, Penguin Classics, 1998, p. 7)

I have tried to provide a text that, while faithful to the meaning of the words of the original, conveys the sense in a way that can be understood today. For example, I have used proper names only, omitting the title 'abba' or 'amma', which is generally given, in the interests of lessening the formality of the material and therefore making it available and immediate as it would have been originally. I have, however, kept the word 'abba' when it is used within the sayings as a form of address, to avoid translating it as 'father' with its misleading clerical overtones, since the majority of the monks were lay people. I have replaced the phrase 'old man' (the literal translation of *senex*) with the word 'hermit', which is, etymologically, 'man of the desert', of the *eremus*, since in these texts *senex* is used as a term of respect and does not necessarily imply age in years as 'old man' does today. In fact the first monks were young adults, and I justify my use of 'hermit' for *senex* on the grounds of removing a wrong implication by presenting them as a group of old people. Two other expressions are used in a special way in the sayings and should therefore be

mentioned here: 'compunction' refers to an inner sense of sorrow for sin that leads to repentance; and a 'love-feast' at first referred, in the Early Church, to a meal closely associated with the Eucharist, but it gradually came to mean a meal of fellowship in its own right among Christians. Where cf. is used next to a biblical reference it indicates an echo of a text rather than an exact quotation. Quotations from Scripture are taken from the Authorized Version of the Bible and psalms are numbered according to the psalter of the Book of Common Prayer. This translation has been discussed, especially at the Oxford Patristic Conferences, with many colleagues to whom I am grateful; I would like especially to thank Dr Luke Dysinger OSB for his encouragement and his practical help with making the minute Latin text of PL visible to me through the miracle of computers and scanners. I would also like to thank the editors of my text for Penguin Classics, whose patience and insight have saved me from many pitfalls. I dedicate this book to my sisters in the community of the Sisters of the Love of God, 'yesterday, today and tomorrow'.

The Desert Fathers

Sayings of the Early Christian Monks

De Vitis Patrum, sive Verba Seniorum, Liber V,
by Pelagius and John

PROGRESS IN PERFECTION

1. Somebody asked Antony, 'What shall I do in order to please God?' He replied, 'Do what I tell you, which is this: wherever you go, keep God in mind; whatever you do, follow the example of holy Scripture; wherever you are, stay there and do not move away in a hurry. If you keep to these guide-lines, you will be saved.'

2. Pambo said to Antony, 'What shall I do?' Antony said, 'Do not trust in your own righteousness. Do not go on sorrowing over a deed that is past. Keep your tongue and your belly under control.'

3. Gregory said, 'God asks three things of anyone who is baptized: to keep the true faith with all his soul and all his might; to control his tongue; to be chaste in his body.'

4. Evagrius said, 'Some of our predecessors used to say that a dry and regular diet combined with love will soon bring a monk to the harbour where the storms of passion do not enter.'

5. He also said, 'A monk was told that his father had died. He said to the messenger, "Do not blaspheme. My Father cannot die."'

6. Macarius said to Zacharias, 'Tell me, what makes a monk?' He said, 'Isn't it wrong for you to be asking me?' Macarius said to him, 'I am sure I should ask you, Zacharias my son. There is something that urges me to ask you.' Zacharias said to him, 'As far as I can tell, abba, I think anyone who controls himself and makes himself content with just what he needs and no more, is indeed a monk.'

7. They used to say about Theodore of Pherme that he kept these three rules before all others: poverty, abstinence, and avoiding the company of other people.

8. John the Short said, 'I will invent a man composed of all the virtues. He would rise at dawn every morning, take up the beginning of each virtue, and keep God's commandments. He would live in great patience, in fear, in long-suffering, in the love of God; with a firm purpose of soul and body; in deep humility, in patience, in trouble of heart and earnestness of practice. He would pray often, with sorrow of heart, keeping his speech pure, his eyes controlled. He would suffer injury without anger, remaining peaceful, and not rendering evil for evil, not looking out for the faults of others, nor puffing himself up, meekly subject to every creature, renouncing material property and everything of the flesh. He would live as though crucified, in struggle,

in lowliness of spirit, in good will and spiritual abstinence, in fasting, in penitence, in weeping. He would fight against evil, be wise and discreet in judgement and chaste in mind. He would receive good treatment with tranquillity, working with his own hands, watching at night, enduring hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness and labour. He would live as though buried in a tomb and already dead, every day feeling death to be near him.'

9. Joseph of Thebes said, 'Three things are seen to be honourable by God. The first is when temptations come on someone who is weak, and are accepted thankfully. The second is when every action is pure before God, mixed with no human motive. The third is when a disciple remains obedient to a spiritual father, and gives up all his self-will.'

10. Cassian told this story about John, who was the father of a community because he was great in his way of life. When he was dying, he was cheerful, and his mind was set upon the Lord; his brothers stood around him and asked for a sentence that would sum up the way to salvation, which he could give them as a legacy by which they might rise to the perfection that is in Christ. With a sigh he said 'I have never obeyed my own will, and I never taught anyone to do anything which I did not do myself first.'

11. A brother asked a hermit, 'Tell me something good that I may do it and live by it.' The hermit said, 'God alone knows what is good. But I have heard that one of the hermits asked the great Nesteros, who was a friend of Antony, 'What good work shall I do?' and he replied, 'Surely all works please God equally? Scripture says, Abraham was hospitable and God was with him; Elijah loved quiet and God was with him; David was humble and God was with him.' So whatever you find you are drawn to in following God's will, do it and let your heart be at peace.'

12. Poemen said, 'To be on guard, to meditate within, to judge with discernment: these are the three works of the soul.'

13. A brother asked him, 'How ought we to live?' Poemen replied, 'We have seen the example of Daniel. They accused him of nothing except that he served his God.'

14. The same hermit said, 'Poverty, suffering and wise discernment are the three parts of a hermit's life. It is written that there were these three, Noah, Job and Daniel. Noah is the type of those who own nothing, Job of those who are suffering, Daniel of those who judge wisely. Where there are these three qualities, there God dwells.'

15. Poemen said, 'If a monk hates two things, he can be free of this world.' A brother inquired, 'What are they?' He said, 'Bodily comfort and conceit.'

16. They used to say of Pambo that in the hour of his death he said to the holy men standing round, 'From the time that I came into this solitude, and built my cell and lived in it, I do not remember having eaten anything I have not worked for. I have not said anything that I regretted saying. But still I go to the Lord, as one who has not yet made a beginning in the service of God.'

17. Sisois said, 'Be despised; put your self-will behind your back; be free of worldly concerns, and you will have peace.'

18. When Chame was dying, he said to his sons, 'Do not live with heretics. Do not take any notice of judges. Do not open your hands to get, but let them be stretched out to give.'

19. A brother said to a hermit, 'How does the fear of God come into the soul?' He said, 'If there is humility and poverty, and no judgement of others, the fear of God will be present there.'

20. A hermit said, 'Let fear and humility, fasting, and weeping, take root in you.'

21. Some of the hermits used to say, 'Whatever you hate for yourself, do not do it to someone else. If you hate being spoken evil of, do not speak evil of another. If you hate being slandered, do not slander another. If you hate him who tries to make you despised, or wrongs you, or takes away what is yours, or anything like that, do not do such things to others. To keep this is enough for salvation.'

22. A hermit said, 'This is the life of a monk: work, obedience, meditation, not to judge others, not to speak evil, not to murmur. For it is written, "You who love God, hate the thing that is evil" (Ps. 97:10). This is monastic life: not to live with the wicked, not to see evil, not to be inquisitive, not to be curious, not to listen to gossip, not to use the hands for taking, but for giving; not to be proud in heart or bad in thought, not to fill the belly, in everything to judge wisely. That is the life of the true monk.'

23. A hermit said, 'Ask God to give you inner grief of heart and humility. Always look at your own sins, and do not judge another's. Be the servant of all. Do not make friends with a woman, or a boy or a heretic. Do not be self-confident. Control your tongue and appetite, and do not drink wine. If anyone speaks to you on a controversial matter, do not argue with him. If he speaks well, say, "Yes." If he speaks ill, say, "I don't know anything about that." Don't argue with what he has said, and then your mind will be at peace.'

2 QUIET

1. Antony said, 'Fish die if they stay on dry land, and in the same way monks who stay outside their cell or remain with secular people fall away from their vow of quiet. As a fish must return to the sea, so must we to our cell, in case by staying outside, we forget to watch inside.'

2. Antony said, 'He who sits alone and is quiet has escaped from three wars: hearing, speaking, seeing; but there is one thing against which he must continually fight: that is, his own heart.'

3. Arsenius when he was still in the palace, prayed to God, saying, 'Lord, show me the way of salvation.' A voice came to him saying, 'Arsenius, flee from men, and you will be saved.' As he left for the monastic life, he prayed again, saying the same words; and he heard a voice saying to him, 'Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the roots of sinlessness.'

4. Archbishop Theophilus of blessed memory once came with a certain judge to see Arsenius. The archbishop questioned Arsenius, wanting to hear some wisdom from him. For a while the hermit was silent, and then he replied, 'If I tell you something, will you do it?' They promised that they would. So he said to them, 'Wherever you hear Arsenius is, do not go there.' Another time the archbishop wanted to see him, and sent a message first to ask if he would open the door to him. He sent a message back saying, 'If you come here, I will open the door to you. But if I have opened the door to you, I must open it to all, and then I shall no longer be able to live here.' When he heard this, the archbishop said, 'Since my visit upsets him, I will not go to see the holy man again.'

5. Once Arsenius came to a place where there was a bed of reeds shaken by the wind. He said to the brothers, 'What is this rustling noise?' They said, 'It is the reeds.' He said to them, 'If a man sits in silence and hears the voice of a bird, he does not have quiet in his heart; how much more difficult is it for you, who hear the sound of these reeds?'

6. They also said of him that his cell was thirty miles away, and that he did not leave it readily, but others did his errands. But when the monks were driven out of the place called Scetis, he went away weeping, saying, 'The world destroyed Rome, and the monks Scetis.'

7. Once when Arsenius was living in Canopus, a virgin, a very rich

lady, and one that feared God, came from Rome hoping to see him. Theophilus the archbishop received her. She asked him to arrange with Arsenius for him to meet her. Theophilus went to Arsenius and said, 'A lady has come from Rome and she wants to see you.' Arsenius refused to receive her. When the lady heard this she gave orders for her camels to be saddled and said, 'I believe that with the help of God I will see him. In my city of Rome there are many people to see but I have come here in order to see saints.' When she reached the hermit's cell by the providence of God he was standing outside it. When the lady saw him she fell at his feet. He helped her up with indignation and looking directly at her said, 'If you want to see my face, look closely; here it is.' But she was too ashamed to raise her eyes. Arsenius said to her, 'Haven't you heard about my way of life? That is what you should be trying to see. Why have you dared to come all this way across the sea; you are a woman and ought not to be going about at all. Have you done this so that you can go back to Rome and say to the other women, "I have seen Arsenius"? In that way you will turn the sea into a highway with women coming to see me.' She said, 'If by God's will I return to Rome, I will not let any other women come here. But pray for me, and remember me always.' He replied, 'I pray God that He will blot the memory of you from my heart.' When she heard that, she went away in distress. When she got back to Alexandria, she began in her sorrow to be ill of a fever. The archbishop was told that she was ill, and came to comfort her. He asked her what was the matter. She said, 'I wish I had never come here. I said to Arsenius, "remember me" and he said, "I pray God that your memory may be blotted from my heart", and now I am dying of sorrow.' The archbishop said to her, 'Do you not realize that you are a woman, and the enemy uses women to attack holy men? That is why he said what he did. He prays for your soul all the time.' So her worry was resolved, and she returned contentedly to her home.

8. Evagrius said, 'Cut the desire for many things out of your heart and so prevent your mind being dispersed and your stillness lost.'

9. In Scetis a brother went to Moses to ask for advice. He said to him, 'Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.'

10. Moses said, 'One who avoids others is like a ripe grape. One who stays in company is like a sour grape.'

11. Nilus said, 'The arrows of the enemy cannot touch someone who loves quiet. But those who wander about among crowds will often be wounded by them.'

12. Poemen said, 'The beginning of evil is to diversify the mind.' He said also, 'It is good to flee from the things of the body. When a man is engaged in conflict about the body, he is like a man standing on the

very edge of a deep pool, into which his enemy can knock him the moment he sees him. But when he has put aside bodily things, he is like a man standing a long way from the pool, where, if the enemy drags him along to throw him in, God will help him while he is being dragged there.'

13. Once Abraham, the disciple of Sisois, said to him, 'Abba, you are now old. Let us go into the world for a short time.' Sisois said to him: 'Yes, provided that we go where there are no women.' The disciple said, 'Where is there a place that is without women except the desert?' Sisois said, 'Then let me stay in the desert.'

14. Matrona said, 'Many solitaries living in the desert have been lost because they lived like people in the world. It is better to live in a crowd and want to live a solitary life than to live in solitude and be longing all the time for company.'

15. A hermit said, 'A monk should buy himself quiet and therefore be able to despise any bodily expense that may occur.'

16. This story was told: There were three friends, serious men, who became monks. One of them chose to make peace between men who were at odds, as it is written, 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matt. 5:9). The second chose to visit the sick. The third chose to go away to be quiet in solitude. Now the first, toiling among contentions, was not able to settle all quarrels and, overcome with weariness, he went to him who tended the sick, and found him also failing in spirit and unable to carry out his purpose. So the two went away to see him who had withdrawn into the desert, and they told him their troubles. They asked him to tell them how he himself had fared. He was silent for a while, and then poured water into a vessel and said, 'Look at the water,' and it was murky. After a little while he said again, 'See now, how clear the water has become.' As they looked into the water they saw their own faces, as in a mirror. Then he said to them, 'So it is with anyone who lives in a crowd; because of the turbulence, he does not see his sins: but when he has been quiet, above all in solitude, then he recognizes his own faults.'

COMPUNCTION

1. It was said about Arsenius that whenever he was doing manual work he kept a cloth at his chest because of the tears that streamed from his eyes.

2. A brother asked Ammon, 'Speak a word to me.' He said to him, 'Go and meditate like the criminals in prison. They keep asking, where is the judge, when will he come? and because they are waiting for him they dread their punishment. The monk should always be waiting for his trial, chiding his soul, saying: "Alas, how shall I stand before the judgement seat of Christ? How shall I give an account of my actions?" If you always meditate like this, you will be saved.'

3. Evagrius said, 'While you sit in your cell, recall your attention, and remember the day of your death and you will see that your body is decaying. Think about the loss, feel the pain. Shrink from the vanity of the world outside. Be retiring, and be careful to keep your vow of quiet, and you will not weaken. Remember the souls in hell. Meditate on their condition, the bitter silence and the moaning, the fear and the strife, the waiting and the pain without relief, the tears that cannot cease to flow. Remember too the day of resurrection, imagine God's terrible and awful judgement. Bring into your sight the confusion of sinners before God and His Christ, before angels and archangels and powers, and all the human race, punishment, everlasting fire, the worm that never dies, the darkness of Tartarus – and above them all the sound of the gnashing of teeth, dread and torments. Bring before your eyes the good laid up for the righteous, their confidence before God the Father and Christ His Son, before angels and archangels and the powers, and all the people in the kingdom of heaven and its gifts, joy and peace. Remember all this. Weep and lament for the judgement of sinners, keep alert to the grief they suffer; be afraid that you are hurrying towards the same condemnation. Rejoice and exult at the good laid up for the righteous. Aim at enjoying the one, and being far from the other. Do not forget this, whether you are in your cell or outside it. Keep these memories in your mind and so cast out of it the sordid thoughts that harm you.'

4. Elias said, 'I fear three things: the first, the time before my soul leaves my body: the second, the time before I meet God face to face: the third, the time before he pronounces his sentence upon me.'

5. When Archbishop Theophilus of holy memory was dying, he said,

‘Arsenius, you are blessed of God, because you have always kept this moment before your eyes.’

6. There was a story that once when some brothers were eating together at a love-feast, one of the brothers at the table laughed. When John saw it, he wept, and said, ‘What do you think that brother has in his heart, that he could laugh when he ought to weep because he is dining on charity?’

7. Jacob said, ‘Like a lantern giving light in a dark little room, so the fear of God comes into a man’s heart and enlightens it, and teaches him all that is good and all the commandments of God.’

8. Some of the monks asked Macarius of Egypt, ‘Why is your body dry, whether you eat or fast?’ He said to them, ‘A wooden poker which turns over and over the brushwood in the fire is itself being slowly burnt away. So if a man cleanses his mind in the fear of God, the fear of God also consumes his body.’

9. Once some monks of Mount Nitria sent a message to Scetis, to ask Macarius the Great to come to see them. They said that if he could not come to them, the whole crowd of them would go to him, since they wanted to see him before he passed on to the Lord. When Macarius arrived in Nitria, the whole congregation gathered in his presence. The elders asked him to speak a word to the brothers. But he shed tears and said, ‘Let us pray and weep, my brothers, before we go hence to the place where our tears consume our bodies.’ They all wept; and fell on their faces, saying, ‘Abba, pray for us.’

10. In Egypt once when Poemen was going somewhere he saw a woman sitting by a grave and weeping bitterly. He said, ‘If all the delights of this world should come to her, they would not bring her out of sorrow. Just so should the monk always be weeping in his heart.’

11. Another time, he went with Anub to the country of Diolcos. Walking past the tombs they saw a woman beating her breast and weeping bitterly. They paused to see her. When they had gone a little further, they met a man and Poemen asked him, ‘What is the matter with the woman over there, that she weeps so bitterly?’ He said, ‘Her husband is dead, and her son, and her brother.’ Poemen said to Anub, ‘I tell you that unless a man mortifies all his self-will and has this kind of grief, he cannot be a monk. The whole life and attention of that woman is wrapped up in grief.’

12. Poemen said also, ‘Grief is twofold: it creates good and it keeps away evil.’

13. A brother asked him, ‘What should I do?’ He said, ‘When Abraham entered the land of promise, he built himself a grave, and bought the land as a burying place for his posterity.’ The brother said to him,

‘What is this burying place?’ Poemen said, ‘A place of weeping and sorrowing.’

14. Athanasius of holy memory asked Pambo to come down from the desert to Alexandria. When he arrived, he saw a woman that was an actress, and he wept. The bystanders asked him why he wept. He said, ‘Two things grieved me. The first was her condemnation; the second, that I take less trouble about pleasing God than she takes about pleasing the worst of mankind.’

15. When Silvanus was sitting one day among the brethren, he was taken up into a rapture, and fell on his face. After a while he got up and wept. The brothers asked him, ‘What is the matter, abba?’ But he was silent, weeping. When they pressed him for an answer, he said to them, ‘I was taken before the judgement seat, and I saw many of our kind going down to torment, and many from the world going into the kingdom.’ Silvanus grieved and after that he would not leave his cell: and if he was forced to go out, he covered his face with his shawl and said, ‘Why should I see the light of this world, where nothing is any use to me?’

16. Syncletica said, ‘All must endure great travail and conflict when they are first converted to the Lord but later they have unspeakable joy. They are like people trying to light a fire, the smoke gets in their eyes, their eyes begin to water, but they succeed in what they want. It is written, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and so we must kindle divine fire with tears and trouble.’

17. Hyperichius said, ‘The watchful monk works night and day to pray continually: but if his heart is broken and lets tears flow, that calls God down from heaven to have mercy.’

18. The brothers went to Felix, who had with him some secular visitors, and they asked him to give them a word. But he said nothing. When they went on asking, he said to them, ‘Do you want to hear a word?’ They replied, ‘Yes, abba.’ So he said, ‘I have no word for you now. When an elder is asked to speak, and the brothers do what he tells them, God gives the elder something to say. But now there are brothers who ask for a word, but do not obey the word they hear and then God takes away His grace from the elder, and he has nothing to say, for He who gives it is not there.’ When the brothers heard this, they groaned and said, ‘Pray for us, abba.’

19. It was said of Hor and Theodore, that they were once putting a goatskin over a cell: and they said to each other, ‘If God visits us now, what shall we do?’ Much upset, they left the place in a hurry and went back to their own cells.

20. A hermit told this story. A brother wanted to become a monk, and his mother forbade him. But he did not give up his purpose, saying, ‘I

want my soul to be saved.’ She opposed him for a long time but when she found that she could not stop him, at last she let him go. He went and became a monk, but he lived that life carelessly. It happened that his mother died, and a short time after he became very ill. He thought he was taken before the judgement seat, and there he found his mother among the people being judged. When she saw him she was horrified and said, ‘Why are you here, my son? Are you condemned like me to this place? What about the words you used to say, “I want my soul to be saved”?’ He was ashamed at her words and, being made stupid by sorrow, he stood there unable to say a word to her. But after this vision, he recovered by God’s mercy from his dangerous illness and was restored to health. He meditated on God’s purpose in visiting him. He went away by himself, cut himself off from all company, considered his own salvation, and lamented his earlier neglect in penitence. His purpose was so fixed that many people asked him to spare himself a little, for he might hurt himself by these immoderate lamentations. But he would not be consoled and said, ‘If I was made ashamed by my mother’s taunts, what sort of shame shall I have when Christ and his holy angels look on me in the day of judgement to condemn me?’

21. A hermit said, ‘If it were possible to die of fear, all the world would perish with terror remembering the coming of God after the resurrection. What will it be like, to see the heavens opened, and God revealed in wrath and fury, and innumerable companies of angels gazing on the whole human race gathered together? Therefore we ought to live our lives as those who must give account of each action to God.’

22. A brother asked a hermit, ‘Why is my heart hard, and why do I not fear God?’ He said to him, ‘I think that if you have reproach in your heart, you will know fear.’ The brother said to him, ‘What is this reproach?’ The hermit said, ‘To reprove your soul in all things, saying to it, “Remember that you have to meet God.” Say also to your soul, “What do I want with people?” I think that if anyone tries to do this, the fear of God will come to him.’

23. A hermit saw someone laughing, and said to him, ‘We have to render an account of our whole life before heaven and earth, and you can laugh?’

24. A hermit said, ‘As the shadow goes everywhere with the body, so we ought to carry penitence and weeping with us everywhere we go.’

25. A brother asked a hermit, ‘Abba, speak a word to me.’ He said to him: ‘When God struck Egypt there was not a house that did not mourn.’

26. A brother asked another hermit, ‘What must I do?’ He said to him,

‘We ought to lament always.’ Once one of the senior monks died, and after several hours recovered consciousness. We asked him, ‘What did you see, abba?’ He told us with sorrow, ‘I heard a voice of sadness saying over and over again, “Woe is me, woe is me.” That is what we should always be saying.’

27. A brother asked a hermit, ‘I hear the hermits weeping, and my soul longs for tears, but they do not come, and I am worried about it.’ He replied, ‘The children of Israel entered the promised land after forty years in the wilderness. Tears are the promised land. When you reach them you will no longer be afraid of the conflict. For it is the will of God that we should be afflicted, so we may always be longing to enter that country.’

SELF-CONTROL

1. Some brothers from Scetis wanted to visit Antony, and set out in a ship to go there. On board they met an old man who also wanted to go to Antony, but he did not belong to their party. During the voyage they talked about the sayings of the fathers, and the Scriptures, and then the manual work that they did, but the old man said nothing at all. When they came to the landing-place, they realized that the old man also was going to see Antony. When they arrived, Antony said to them, 'You found good company on your journey in this old man.' He said to the old man, 'You found good companions in these brothers.' The old man said, 'Yes, they are good, but their house has no door. Anyone who wants to go into the stable and steals the donkey.' He said this because they had said the first thing that came into their heads.

2. Daniel said about Arsenius that he used to keep vigil all night. He would stay awake all night, and about dawn when nature seemed to force him to sleep, he would say to sleep, 'Come, you bad servant,' and he would snatch a little sleep sitting down, but very soon he would get up again.

3. Arsenius said, 'One hour's sleep is enough for a monk if he is a fighter.'

4. Daniel said of him, 'All the years he lived near us, we gave him the minimum amount of food to last each year, and every time we went to visit him, he shared it with us.'

5. He said also that Arsenius only changed the water for his palm leaves once a year, otherwise he just added to it. He would make a plait of palm leaves and weave it till noon. The elders asked him why he would not change the water for the palm leaves, which was stinking. He said to them, 'When I was in the world I used incense and sweet-smelling ointments, so now I profit by this stink.'

6. He also said that when Arsenius heard that all the apples were ripe, he said, 'Bring them to me.' He took one small bite of each kind, giving thanks to God.

7. They said of Agatho that for three years he kept a stone in his mouth in order to teach himself silence.

8. Once Agatho was going on a journey with his disciples. One of them found a small bag of green peas on the road, and said to him,

‘Abba, if you say so, I will pick it up.’ Agatho looked at him in astonishment, and said, ‘Did you put it there?’ The brother replied, ‘No.’ Agatho said, ‘Why do you want to pick up something you did not put down?’

9. Once a hermit came to see Achillas, and saw blood dripping from his mouth so he asked him, ‘What is the matter, abba?’ Achillas said, ‘A brother came and said something that upset me, and I have been brooding over that grievance. I prayed God that he would take it away, and the word turned into blood in my mouth. Look, I have spat it out, and I am now at peace, and have forgotten my grievance.’

10. Once Achillas came to the cell of Isaiah in Scetis, and found him eating. He had put salt and water in a dish. Seeing that he was hiding the dish behind the plaits of palm leaves, Achillas said, ‘Tell me what you were eating.’ He answered, ‘I am sorry, abba, but I was cutting palms and began to burn with thirst. So I dipped a piece of bread in salt, and put it in my mouth. But my mouth was parched, and I could not swallow the bread, so I was forced to pour a little water on the salt so that I could swallow it. Forgive me.’ Achillas used to say, ‘Come and see Isaiah eating soup in Scetis. If you want to eat soup, go to Egypt.’

11. They said of Ammoi that though he was ill in a bed for several years, he never relaxed his discipline and never went to the store cupboard at the back of his cell to see what was in it. Many people brought him presents because he was ill. But even when his disciple, John, went in and out, he shut his eyes so as not to see what he was doing. He knew what it means to be a faithful monk.

12. Benjamin, who was a priest in Cellia, said that some brothers went to a hermit in Scetis and wanted to give him some oil. But the hermit said, ‘Look, there is the little jar of oil which you brought me three years ago. It is still where you put it.’ Benjamin said, ‘When we heard that, we were amazed by the hermit’s austerity.’

13. They said that Dioscorus of Namisias made his bread out of barley, and his soup out of lentils. Every year he made one particular resolution: either not to meet anyone for a year, or not to speak, or not to taste cooked food, or not to eat any fruit, or not to eat vegetables. This was his system in everything. He made himself master of one thing, and then started on another, and so on each year.

14. Evagrius quoted a hermit as saying, ‘I cut away bodily pleasure in order to get rid of occasions for anger. I know that it is because of pleasure that I have to struggle with anger, my mind being disturbed, and my understanding disordered.’

15. Once Epiphanius the bishop from Cyprus sent a message to Hilarion, and asked him, ‘Come, let me see you before I die.’ When

they had met and had greeted each other, part of a chicken was set before them. The bishop took it and gave it to Hilarion. The hermit said to him, 'No, thank you, abba. From the time I took the habit, I have not eaten anything that has been killed.' Epiphanius said to him, 'From the time I took the habit, I have let no one go to sleep who still had something against me, and I have never gone to sleep with an enemy in the world.' Hilarion said to him, 'I beg your pardon. Your devotion is greater than mine.'

16. They said of Helladius that he lived twenty years in his cell, and did not once raise his eyes to look at the roof.

17. Once Zeno was walking in Palestine; and when he had finished his work, he sat down to eat near a cucumber plant. His thoughts tried to persuade him, saying, 'Pick one of those cucumbers for yourself, and eat it. What does it matter?' He replied to his temptation, 'Thieves go down to torment. Test yourself then to see whether you can bear torment.' So he stood in the sun for five days, without drinking, and he was dried up by the heat. His thoughts, as it were, spoke to him saying, 'We can't bear such torment.' So he said to himself, 'If you can't bear torment, do not steal in order to eat.'

18. Theodore said, 'The monk's body grows weak if he only eats a little bread.' But someone else said, 'It grows weaker still if he keeps watch at night.'

19. John the Short said, 'If a king wants to take a city filled with his enemies, he first captures their food and water, and when they are starving he subdues them. So it is with gluttony. If a man is sincere about fasting and is hungry, the enemies that trouble his soul will grow weak.'

20. He also said, 'As I was climbing up the road which leads to Scetis, carrying plaits of palms, I saw a camel-driver who spoke to me and upset me. So I dropped what I was carrying, and ran away.'

21. Isaac the presbyter of Cellia said, 'I know a brother who was harvesting and wanted to eat an ear of wheat. He said to the owner of the field, "Will you let me eat one ear?" When the owner heard it, he wondered, and said, "The whole field is yours, abba, why do you ask me?" That brother was as scrupulous as that.'

22. One of the brothers asked Isidore, the priest of Scetis, 'Why are the demons so afraid of you?' He said, 'Ever since I became a monk, I have been trying not to let anger rise as far as my mouth.'

23. He said also that though he felt impulses towards the sins of concupiscence or of anger, he had not consented to them for forty years.

24. Cassian told a story of John who went to see Paesius who had lived for forty years in the depths of the desert. Because he loved him

a great deal, he asked him with the confidence of love, 'You have been isolated so long, and cannot easily meet any with troubles, tell me, what progress have you made?' He said, 'From the time I began to be a solitary, the sun has never seen me eating.' John said to him, 'Nor me angry.'

25. He said also that Moses told him something Serapion had said to him: 'While I was still a boy, I was staying with Theonas; and after each meal I was moved by some demon and stole one of the pieces of bread, and ate it secretly. Theonas knew nothing of the matter. For some time I went on with this, until the sin began to dominate my mind, and I could not stop myself. My conscience troubled me, and I was ashamed to say anything to him about it. But by God's mercy it happened that some visitors came to the hermit in search of profit to their soul, and they asked him about their thoughts. He replied, "Nothing harms the monk so much, and gives such happiness to the demons, as when he conceals his thoughts from his spiritual father." He also talked to them about self-control. While he was speaking, I thought to myself that God had revealed to him what I had done. Stricken to the heart, I began to weep. Then I pulled the piece of bread out of my robe, threw myself on the floor, and begged forgiveness for what I had done, and asked for prayers so that I might be helped not to do it again. Then Theonas said, "My son, you are set free from your captivity without me saying anything. You are freed by your own confession. The demon, which by your silence you let dwell in your heart, has been killed because you confessed your sin. You let him control you because you never said no to him, never withstood him. He will never make a home in you again, because you have thrown him out into the open." He had hardly finished speaking when his words were visibly fulfilled and something like a flame shot out of my breast and so filled the house with its stench that the people present thought it was sulphur burning. Theonas said, "My son, by this sign the Lord has proved that what I told you is true and you are free." '

26. They said of Macarius that if he was asked to eat among the brothers, he made a rule for himself that if wine was offered, he would drink it for the brothers' sake: and then, for one cup of wine he would go without water for a whole day. Some brothers wanted to refresh him and gave him some wine. He took it with joy, so as later to punish himself. But his disciple, knowing the reason, said to the brothers, 'For God's sake, I beg you, do not give him any wine. In the cell afterwards he pays for it with torment.' When the brothers heard this, they gave him no more wine.

27. Macarius the Great said to the brothers in Scetis after a service in church, 'Flee, my brothers.' One of the brothers said to him, 'Abba,

where can we flee when we are already in the desert?' He put his finger upon his lips and said: 'I tell you, you must flee this.' Then he went into his cell, shut the door, and remained alone.

28. Macarius said also, 'If you are stirred to anger when you want to reprove someone, you are gratifying your own passions. Do not lose yourself in order to save another.'

29. Poemen said, 'Unless Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had come, the temple of the Lord would not have been burnt (2 Kgs. 25:8-9). Unless greed has brought idleness into the soul, the mind will not fail in its fight against the enemy.'

30. They said of Poemen that when he was invited to eat and did not want to go, he went weeping, praying that he might obey his brothers and not sadden them.

31. They told Poemen that a certain monk did not drink wine. He said to them, 'Wine is not for monks at all.'

32. Poemen also said, 'They smoke out bees in order to steal their honey. So idleness drives the fear of God from the soul, and steals its good works.'

33. One of the hermits told this story of Poemen and his brothers, who lived in Egypt. Their mother wanted to see them, and could not. So she looked for a chance, and stood in front of them as they were going to church. The moment they saw her, they turned, went to their cell, and shut the door in her face. But she stood at the door in misery and screamed and begged them to see her. Anub, hearing her, went to Poemen and said, 'What shall we do about the little old woman who is crying outside the door?' Poemen got up and went to the door; he stood just inside and heard her beseeching them miserably. He said, 'What are you screaming for, old woman?' When she heard his voice, she cried out the more and implored them, 'I want to see you, my sons. Why should I not see you? Am I not your mother? Have I not given you milk at the breast, and now every hair of my head is grey? When I hear your voices, I am in distress.' Poemen said to her, 'Do you want to see us in this world or the next?' She said to him, 'If I don't see you in this world, shall I see you in the next, my sons?' He said, 'If you don't insist on seeing us here, you shall see us there.' So the woman went away happy, saying, 'If I shall indeed see you there, I don't want to see you here.'

34. They said of Pior that he ate while walking about. When someone asked him why he ate in that way, he replied it was accidental and not necessary. But when someone else asked the same question, he replied, 'It is so that I do not receive bodily pleasure from eating.'

35. They said of Peter, named Pyonius, who was in Cellia, that he did not drink wine. When he grew old, they asked him to take a little

wine. When he refused, they warmed some water, and offered it to him. He said, 'My sons, I drink it as though it were spiced wine.' He was content with warm water.

36. Once they celebrated a great service on the mountain of Antony, and a little wine was found there. One of the elders took a small cup, and carried it to Sisois, and gave it him. He drank it and a second time Sisois received it, and drank it. An elder offered it a third time but he would not accept it, and said, 'Stop, brother, don't you know that Satan still exists?'

37. A brother asked Sisois, 'What am I to do? When I go to church, love for the brothers often makes me stay to the meal afterwards.' Sisois said to him, 'That is burdensome.' Abraham his disciple said to him, 'If in the meeting after church on Saturday and Sunday, a brother drinks three cups of wine, is it a lot?' The hermit said, 'If there were no Satan, it would not be much.'

38. Often his disciple used to say to Sisois, 'Come, abba, let us eat.' He would say, 'Haven't we already eaten, my son?' The disciple would reply, 'No, abba.' The hermit used to say, 'If we have not eaten yet, bring the food, let us eat.'

39. Sisois once said with confidence, 'For thirty years I have not prayed to God without sin. When I pray, I say "Lord Jesus Christ, protect me from my tongue." Even now, it causes me to fall every day.'

40. Once Silvanus and his disciple Zacharias arrived at a monastery. The monks made them eat a little before they went on their way. When they left, the disciple saw a pool by the wayside and wanted to drink. Silvanus said, 'Zacharias, today is a fast.' Zacharias said, 'But surely we have already eaten today, abba?' The hermit said to him, 'We ate their meal out of love for them, but when we are on our own let us keep our fast, my son.'

41. The holy Syncletica said, 'We who have chosen this holy way of life ought above all to preserve chastity. Even among men of the world chastity is highly regarded. But in the world they are also stupid about it, and sin with their other senses. For they peep indecently, and laugh immoderately.'

42. She said also, 'Bodily poison is cured by still stronger antidotes; so fasting and prayer drive sordid temptation from us.'

43. She also said, 'The pleasures and riches of the world must not attract you as if they were of any use to you. Because of its pleasure the art of cooking is respected, but by rigorous fasting you should trample on that pleasure. Never have enough bread to satisfy you and do not long for wine.'

44. Sisois said, 'Our form of pilgrimage is keeping the mouth closed.'

45. Hyperichius said, 'Donkeys are terrified of a lion. So temptations to concupiscence are terrified of an experienced monk.'

46. He also said, 'Fasting is the monk's control over sin. The man who stops fasting is like a stallion who lusts the moment he sees a mare.'

47. He also said, 'When the monk's body is dried up with fasting, this lifts his soul from the depths. Fasting dries up the channels down which worldly pleasures flow.'

48. He also said, 'The chaste monk shall be honoured on earth, and in heaven he will be crowned in the presence of the Most High.'

49. He also said, 'The monk who cannot control his tongue when he is angry, will not control his passions at other times.'

50. He also said, 'Do not let your mouth speak an evil word: the vine does not bear thorns.'

51. He also said, 'It is better to eat meat and drink wine than to eat the flesh of the brothers by disparaging them.'

52. He also said, 'The serpent whispered to Eve and cast her out of paradise. The man who whispers against his neighbour is like the serpent. He condemns the soul of whoever listens to him, and he does not save his own.'

53. Once there was a feast in Scetis, and they gave a cup of wine to a hermit. He threw it down, saying, 'Take this death away from me.' When the others who were eating with him saw this, they did not drink either.

54. Another time a vessel of wine was brought there from the first fruits of the vintage, so that a cup of it could be given to each of the brothers. A brother came in and saw that they were drinking wine, and fled up on to a roof, and the roof fell in. When they heard the noise, they ran and found the brother lying half dead. They began to blame him, saying, 'It served you right, you were guilty of vainglory.' But one of them embraced him, and said, 'Leave my son alone, he has done a good work. By the living Lord, this roof shall not be rebuilt in my time, as a reminder to the world that a roof fell in Scetis because of a cup of wine.'

55. Once a priest from Scetis went to see the bishop of Alexandria. When he came back to Scetis the brothers asked him, 'What is happening in the city?' But he said to them, 'Indeed, my brothers, I did not see the face of any one except the bishop.' When they heard this, they were amazed, and said, 'What do you think has happened to all the people?' They hesitated to believe him. But he cheered them by saying, 'I wrestled with my soul not to look at anyone's face except the bishop.' So the brothers were edified, and kept themselves from raising up their eyes.

56. Once a hermit came to see another hermit. The second one said to his disciple, 'Make us a little lentil soup, my son.' He made it. 'Dip the bread in it for us.' He dipped it. They went on with their godly conversation till noon next day. Then the hermit said to his disciple, 'Make us a little lentil soup, my son.' He replied, 'I made it yesterday.' So they got up and ate their food.

57. A hermit came to see another hermit, who cooked a few lentils and said: 'Let us worship God and then eat.' One of them recited the whole psalter. The other read and meditated upon two of the greater prophets. In the morning the visitor went away and they had forgotten to eat the food.

58. A brother felt hungry at dawn, and struggled not to eat till nine o'clock. When nine o'clock came, he made himself wait till noon. At noon he dipped his bread and sat down to eat, but then got up again, saying, 'I will wait till three.' At three o'clock he prayed, and saw the devil's work going out of him like smoke; and his hunger ceased.

59. One of the hermits was ill, and for many days he could not eat. His disciple begged him to take something and restore his strength. So the disciple went away and made some lentil cake. A jar was hanging in the cell containing a little honey: and there was another jar with evil-smelling linseed oil, which was only used for the lamp. The brother took the wrong jar in error and put grease instead of honey into the mixture. The hermit tasted it, and said nothing, but quietly ate the mouthful. The disciple forced him to take a second mouthful. The sick hermit tortured himself and ate it. Yet a third time the disciple pressed it upon him. But he did not want to eat, and said, 'Truly, my son, I can't.' But his disciple coaxed him, and said, 'It is good, abba, look, I will keep you company.' When the disciple tasted it and saw what he had done he fell flat on his face, and said, 'Oh dear, abba! I have killed you, and you have caused me to sin like this because you did not say anything.' The hermit said to him, 'Do not worry, my son. If God had willed that I should eat honey you would have been given the honey to mix in the food.'

60. They said of one hermit that he sometimes longed to eat a cucumber. So he took one and hung it in front of him where he could see it. He was not overcome by his longing, and did not eat it, but tamed himself, and repented that he had wanted it at all.

61. Once a brother went to visit his sister who was ill in a nunnery. She was someone of great faith. She herself had never agreed to see a man nor did she want to give her brother occasion for coming into the company of women. She commanded him, 'Go away, my brother, and pray for me, for by Christ's grace I shall see you in the kingdom of heaven.'

62. On a journey a monk met some nuns and when he saw them he turned aside off the road. The abbess said to him, 'If you had been a true monk, you would not have looked to see that we are women.'

63. Once some brothers went to Alexandria to see Archbishop Theophilus and to be present when after the service he destroyed a pagan temple. While they were eating with the archbishop, they were served with veal, and ate it without realizing it. The archbishop took a piece of meat, and gave it to the brother who was sitting next to him, and said, 'Look, here is a good piece of meat. Eat it, abba.' But they answered him, 'Till now, we thought we were eating vegetables. If this is meat, we do not eat it.' None of them would take another mouthful.

64. A brother brought some new bread to Cellia and invited the monks to taste it. When they had each eaten two rolls of bread, they stopped. But the brother knew how austere was their abstinence, and humbly began to beg them, 'For God's sake eat today until you are filled.' So they ate another two rolls each.

See how these true and self-disciplined monks ate much more than they needed, for God's sake.

65. Once one of the hermits lay gravely ill, and was losing a lot of blood from his bowels. A brother brought him some dry fruit, and stewed it, and offered it to him, saying, 'Eat; perhaps it will do you good.' The hermit looked at him for a long time, and said, 'I want you to know that I wish God would leave me my sickness for thirty years more.' In his weakness he absolutely refused to take even a little food; so the brother took away what he had brought, and returned to his cell.

66. Another hermit had lived in the desert for a long time. It happened that a brother came to see him and found he was ill. He washed his face, and made a meal for him out of what he had brought. When the hermit saw it, he said, 'Well, brother, I had forgotten that men found comfort in food.' He offered him a cup of wine also. When he saw it, he wept, saying, 'I hoped I would never drink wine before I died.'

67. A hermit made a resolution not to drink anything. If ever he was thirsty he washed a vessel and filled it with water and hung it in front of his eyes. When the brothers asked him why he was doing this, he replied, 'So that if I do not taste what I long for although I can see it, my devotion will be greater and I shall be granted a greater reward by the Lord.'

68. On a journey, a brother had with him his old mother. They came to a river, and the old woman could not get across. Her son took off his cloak, and wrapped it round his hands, so as not to touch his mother's body and carried her across the river. His mother said to

him, 'Why did you wrap up your hands like that, my son?' He said, 'Because a woman's body is fire. Simply because I was touching you, the memory of other women might come into my mind.'

69. One of the monks said that he knew a brother who fasted in his cell for the whole of Holy Week. When at last he came to mass on Saturday, he went away as soon as he had communicated, to prevent the other brothers forcing him to join in the dinner in the church. In his own cell he only ate some boiled beetroot, with salt but without bread.

70. At a meeting of the brothers in Scetis, they were eating dates. One of them, who was ill from excessive fasting, brought up some phlegm in a fit of coughing, and unintentionally it fell on another of the brothers. The brother was tempted by an evil thought and felt driven to say, 'Be quiet, and do not spit on me.' So to tame himself and restrain his own angry thought he picked up what had been spat and put it in his mouth and swallowed it. Then he began to say to himself. 'If you say to your brother what will sadden him, you will have to eat what nauseates you.'

5 LUST

1. Antony said, 'I think that the body has a natural movement within itself, which obeys the orders of the mind, a kind of inclination of which the body's actions are only symptoms. There is a second movement in the body, caused by eating and drinking, by which the blood is heated and excited. That is why St Paul said, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess' (Eph. 5:18), and again the Lord commanded his disciples in the Gospel, 'See that your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness' (Luke 21:34). There is a third movement which comes from the deceit and envy of demons against those who are trying to live a good life. It is a help to know that there are three bodily inclinations – from nature, from too much food, and from the demons.'

2. Gerontius of Petra said, 'Many people who are tempted by pleasures of the flesh do not sin with the body but lust with the mind; they keep their bodily virginity but lust in their heart. It is better then, beloved, to do what is written, "Let everyone keep a close guard upon his heart" (Prov. 4:23).'

3. Cassian said, 'Moses the Hermit told us, "It is good not to hide our thoughts; we ought to disclose them to discreet and devout elders; but not to those who are old merely in years, for many have found final despair instead of comfort by confessing to those whom they saw to be old, but who were in fact inexperienced." '

4. There was once a brother who was very eager to seek goodness. Being very disturbed by the demon of lust, he came to a hermit and told him about his thoughts. The hermit was inexperienced and when he heard all this, he was shocked, and said he was a wicked brother, unworthy of his monk's habit because he had thoughts like that. When the brother heard this, he despaired, left his cell and started on his way back to the world. But by God's providence, Apollo met him. Seeing he was so upset and sad, he said to him, 'Son, why are you so unhappy?' The brother was very embarrassed, and at first said nothing. But when Apollo pressed him to say what was happening to him, he admitted everything and said, 'It is because lustful thoughts trouble me. I confessed them to that hermit, and he says I now have no hope of salvation. So I have despaired, and am on my way back to the world.' When Apollo heard this, he went on asking questions like a wise doctor, and gave him this counsel, 'Do not be cast down, son, nor

despair of yourself. Even at my age and with my experience of the spiritual life, I am still troubled by thoughts like yours. Do not fail now; this trouble cannot be cured by our efforts, but only by God's mercy. Do as I say and go back to your cell.' The brother did so. Then Apollo went to the cell of the hermit who had made the brother despair. He stood outside the cell, and prayed to the Lord with tears, saying, 'Lord, you permit men to be tempted for their good; transfer the war that brother is suffering to this hermit: let him learn by experience in his old age what many years have not taught him, and so let him find out how to sympathize with people undergoing this kind of temptation.' As soon as he ended his prayer he saw a black man standing by the cell firing arrows at the hermit. As though he had been wounded, the hermit began to totter and lurch like a drunken man. When he could bear it no longer, he came out of his cell, and set out on the same road by which the young man started to return to the world. Apollo understood what had happened, and went to meet him. He came up to him and said, 'Where are you going? Why are you so upset?' When the hermit saw that the holy Apollo understood what had happened, he was ashamed and said nothing. Apollo said to him, 'Go back to your cell and see in others your own weakness and keep your own heart in order. For either you were ignorant of the devil in spite of your age, or you were contemptuous, and did not deserve to gain strength by struggling with the devil as all other men must. But struggle is not the right word, when you could not stand up to his attack for one day. This has happened to you because of the young monk. He came to you because he was being attacked by the common enemy of us all. You ought to have given him words of consolation to help him against the devil's attack but instead you drove him to despair. You did not remember the wise man's saying, which orders us to deliver the men who are drawn towards death, and not to cease to redeem men ready to be killed. You did not remember our Saviour's parable, "You should not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax" (Matt. 12:20). No one can endure the enemy's clever attacks, nor quench, nor control the leaping fire natural to the body, unless God's grace preserves us in our weakness. In all our prayers we should ask for his mercy to save us, so that he may turn aside this scourge which is aimed even at you. For he makes a man to grieve, and then lifts him up to salvation; he strikes, and his hand heals; he humbles and exalts; he gives death and then life; he leads to hell and brings back from hell (1 Sam. 2:6). So Apollo prayed again, and at once the hermit was set free from his inner war. Apollo urged him to ask God to give him a wise heart, in order to know how best to speak.

5. When Cyrus of Alexandria was asked about the temptation of lust, he said, 'If you are not tempted, you have no hope; if you are not

tempted, it is because you are sinning. The man who does not fight sin at the stage of temptation is sinning already in his body. The man who is sinning in his flesh has no trouble from temptation.'

6. A hermit asked a brother, 'Do you often talk with women?' The brother said, 'No.' He went on, 'My temptations come from paintings old and new, memories of mine which trouble me through pictures of women.' But the hermit said to him, 'Do not fear the dead, but flee the living; flee from consenting to sin or committing sin, and take a longer time over your prayers.'

7. Mathois used to say that a brother came and told him that the slanderer was worse than the fornicator. He replied, 'This is a hard saying.' Then the brother said to him, 'What do you think about the matter?' Mathois said, 'Slander is bad, but it can be cured quickly; the slanderer can do penance and say "I have spoken wrongly," and it is over. But lust is certain death.'

8. Poemen said, 'As a bodyguard is always standing by to protect the Emperor, so the soul should always be ready to fight the demon of lust.'

9. A brother once came to Poemen and said to him, 'What am I to do, abba? I am wretched with lust. I went to Hybistion, and he told me: "You must not let this passion live in you any longer." ' Poemen said to him, 'Hybistion lives like the angels in heaven, and he does not know about these things. But you and I are full of lust. If the monk controls his stomach and his tongue, and stays in solitude, he can trust that he is not yet lost.'

10. They said of Sarah that for thirteen years she was fiercely attacked by the demon of lust. She never prayed that the battle should leave her, but she used to say only, 'Lord, give me strength.'

11. They also said of her that the same demon of lust was once attacking her threateningly, tempting her with vain thoughts of the world. She continued in the fear of God and maintained the rigour of her fasting. Once when she climbed up on the roof to pray, the spirit of lust appeared to her in bodily form and said to her, 'You have overcome me, Sarah.' But she replied, 'It is not I who have overcome you, but my Lord Christ.'

12. A brother was obsessed by lust and it was like a fire burning day and night in his heart. But he struggled on, not examining the temptation nor consenting to it. After a long time, the fire left him, extinguished by his perseverance.

13. Another brother was obsessed by lust. He got up in the night and went to tell a hermit about his temptations and the hermit consoled him. So he returned, strengthened, to his cell. But again the spirit of lust tempted him and a second time he went to the hermit. This

happened several times. The hermit did not reproach him, but said these words to his profit, 'Do not give in to the devil, and be careful about your soul. Whenever the demon troubles you, come to me, and this will rebuke him, and so he will go away. Nothing troubles the demon of lust more than laying bare his urgings. Nothing pleases him more than the concealment of the temptation.' Eleven times the brother went to the hermit, and blamed himself for his imaginings. Then the brother said to him, 'Of your charity, abba, say something encouraging.' The hermit said to him, 'Believe me, my son, if God allowed the imaginings which attack me to be passed to you, you would not be able to bear them but would be utterly destroyed.' So by the words and deep humility of the hermit the brother found rest from the temptation to lust.

14. Another brother was attacked by lust. He began to struggle and to fast more, and for fourteen years he guarded himself against this temptation and did not give in to it. After that he went to the community and told to them all what he was suffering. A decree was made, and for a week they all fasted on his behalf, praying to God continually; and so his temptation ceased.

15. A hermit said about the temptation to lust, 'Do you want to be saved? Go, and discipline yourself, "Seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). In the world there are boxers who are hit hard and yet stand firm and receive crowns. Sometimes one is set upon by two at once, and their blows give him strength so that he overcomes them. Have you not seen what strength exercise brings? So stand and be strong and the Lord will defeat your enemy for you.'

16. On this same temptation, another hermit said, 'You should be like a man walking along the street past an inn, and sniffing the smell of meat frying or roasting. Anyone who likes goes in and eats. People who do not want it, pass by and only sniff the smell. So you ought to put the smell away from you; get up and pray "Lord, Son of God, help me." Do this against other temptations. We cannot make temptations vanish, but we can struggle against them.' At once a light appeared in his heart.

17. Another hermit said, 'We suffer temptation because we are careless. If we always remember that God dwells in us, we shall never bring into ourselves anything that is not his. The Lord Christ is in us and with us, and watches our life. Because we have Him within us and contemplate Him, we ought not to be idle; we should make ourselves holy as He is holy. If we stand upon a rock, the power of the wicked one will be broken. Do not be afraid of him, and he can do nothing against you. Pray with courage this psalm, "They that trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion; they that dwell in Jerusalem shall stand fast for

ever” (Ps. 125:1).’

18. A brother said to a hermit, ‘If a monk falls to sin, he is punished like a person who has fallen from a higher state to a lower, and must work hard until he rises again. But he who comes from the world, is like a beginner advancing to a higher state.’ The hermit replied, ‘A monk falling into temptation is like a ruined house. If he is a serious, sober person, he can rebuild this ruin. He will find the right materials for building, and he will lay foundations, collect stone and sand, and everything else he needs, and so his building will grow rapidly higher. But the builder who did not dig or lay foundations, and has none of the right materials, will go away just hoping that some day the house will be built. If the monk falls into temptation, and turns to the Lord, he has the best materials, that is, meditation on the law of God, psalmody, work with his hands, prayer, and silence, which are the foundations of his building. A newcomer will find himself low down on the ladder of religion until he has learnt all these.’

19. A brother who was obsessed by lust went to a famous hermit and said to him, ‘Of your charity, pray for me, for I am beset by lust.’ The hermit prayed for him to the Lord. He came a second time to the hermit and said the same words, and again the hermit was careful to beseech the Lord on his behalf, and said, ‘Lord, show me why the devil is doing this work in that brother; I prayed to you, but he has not yet found peace.’ The Lord showed him what was happening to that brother. He saw the brother sitting down, and the spirit of lust near him playing with him. An angel was standing near to help him and was frowning at that brother because he did not throw himself upon God, but took pleasure in playing with his thoughts, turning towards them. The hermit realized that the chief trouble was in the brother himself. So he said to him, ‘You are toying with these thoughts.’ Then he taught him how to reject thoughts like these. The brother’s soul revived under the hermit’s teaching and prayer, and he found rest from his temptation.

20. Once the disciple of a great hermit was tempted by lust. When the hermit saw him struggling, he said, ‘Shall I ask the Lord to release you from your trouble?’ But he said, ‘Abba, I see that although it is a painful struggle I am profiting from having to carry this burden. But ask God in your prayers, that he will give me enough patience to endure it.’ Then his abba said to him, ‘Now I know that you are far advanced, my son, and beyond me.’

21. They said of one of the hermits that he had initially gone to Scetis taking his infant son with him. The boy was brought up among the monks and did not know what women were. When he became a man, the demons showed him visions of women at night. He told his father, and wondered what they were. Once they both went into Egypt and

saw women. The son said, 'Father, there are the people who came to me during the night in Scetis.' His father said, 'These are monks of the world, my son. They wear one kind of dress, and monks of the desert another.' The hermit was amazed that the demons had shown him visions of women in Scetis, and they both went straight back to their cell.

22. A brother was tested by temptation in Scetis. The enemy brought into his mind the memory of a beautiful woman which troubled him deeply. By God's providence it chanced that a visitor came from Egypt and arrived in Scetis. When they met to talk, he told the brother that his wife was dead (she was the woman about whom the monk was tempted). When he heard the news, he put on his cloak at night and went to the place where he had heard she was buried. He dug in the place, and wiped blood from her corpse on his cloak and when he returned he kept it in his cell. When it smelt too bad, he put it in front of him and said to his temptation, 'Look, this is what you desire. You have it now, be content.' So he punished himself with the smell until his passions died down.

23. A man once came to Scetis wanting to be a monk. He brought with him his infant son, who had just been weaned. When the child grew to be a young man, the demons began to attack him and trouble him. He said to his father, 'I am going back to the world, because I cannot bear these bodily passions.' His father helped him but the young man said, 'I cannot bear it any longer, father. Let me go back to the world.' His father said to him, 'Listen to me, son. Take forty loaves, and enough palm leaves for forty days' work, and go to the inner desert; stay there forty days and God's will be done.' He obeyed his father and went into the desert and remained there, making plaits from the dry palm leaves and eating dry bread. After he had been there twenty days he saw a demon coming to attack him. The devil came to him like a black woman, evil-smelling and ugly. He could not bear her smell and thrust her from him. She said to him: 'I am she who seems sweet in the hearts of men. But because of your obedience and travail, God has not let me seduce you, but has shown you my ugliness.' He got up and thanked God, and came to his father, and said, 'Now I do not want to go to the world, father. I have seen the devil's work, and his foulness.' But his father knew what had happened, and said, 'If you had stayed there forty days, and done all that I told you, you would have seen still greater things.'

24. A hermit was once living far out in the desert. A woman of his family wanted to see him after many years; she found out where he was and took the road to the desert. She joined some camel-drivers and went with them into the desert, for she was being drawn there by the devil. When she reached the hermit's door, she knocked, saying

who she was. 'I am your kin,' and she stayed with him. But another monk was living nearer to Egypt.

He was filling his jug with water at supper time. Suddenly the jug was upset, and the water spilt. By God's inspiration he said to himself, 'I will go to the desert, and tell the others what happened to this water.' He got up and went. At evening he slept in a pagan temple by the roadside, and during the night he heard demons saying, 'Tonight we have driven that monk to lust.' When he heard this, he was grieved and he went to the hermit, and found him sad, and said to him, 'What am I to do, abba? I filled my jug with water and at supper time it was spilt.' The hermit said to him, 'You have come to ask me why your jug was upset. But what am I to do? Last night I fell into lusting.' He replied, 'I knew that.' The hermit said, 'How did you know?' He replied, 'I was sleeping in a temple, and I heard demons talking about you.' The hermit said, 'Look here, I am going back to the world.' But he begged him not to saying, 'Don't go, abba, stay here in your cell but send that woman away. This has happened because the enemy attacked you.' When the hermit heard this, he made his way of life more penitential and sorrowful, until he returned to his earlier state.

25. A hermit said, 'Chastity is born of tranquillity, and silence, and inner prayer.'

26. A brother asked a hermit, 'If a man happens to fall into temptation, what becomes of those who are caused to stumble by it?' The hermit told him this story. 'In a monastery in Egypt there was a deacon. An official, persecuted by a judge, came there with all his family. By the devil's instigation, that deacon lay with the official's wife and all the brothers were shocked. But he went to a hermit, and told him what had happened. Now the hermit had a secret inner room to his cell. When the deacon saw this, he said, "Bury me alive here, and do not let anyone know." He hid in that inner room, and there did true penance. A long time after, it happened that the Nile failed to flood. When they were all saying litanies, it was revealed to one of those holy men that unless the deacon who had hidden with such and such a monk, should return, the water would not rise. When they heard this, they marvelled, and came and hurriedly brought him out of his hiding place. He prayed, and the water rose. The men who had before been shocked by him, were now edified by his penitence and glorified God.'

27. Two brothers went to a town to sell what they had made. In the town they separated, and one of them fell into fornication. Afterwards the other brother said, 'Let us go back to our cell, brother.' But he replied, 'I'm not coming.' The other asked him, 'Why, brother?' He replied, 'Because when you left me, I was tempted, and was guilty of fornication.' The other, wanting to help him, said, 'The same thing

happened to me; after I left you, I also fell into fornication. Let us go together, and do penance with all our might, and God will pardon us sinners.' When they returned to their cell, they told the brothers what had happened to them, and were told what penance they should do. But the one did penance not for himself, but for the other, as though he himself had sinned. God, seeing his earnestness and his charity, revealed to one of the elders, a few days later, that he had forgiven the fornicator because of the charity of the brother who had not sinned. Truly, this was to lay down his soul for his brother.

28. Once a brother came to a hermit and said, 'My brother keeps leaving me, and goes travelling everywhere: and I am upset about it.' The hermit said, 'Bear it calmly, brother. God will see your earnestness and endurance and will bring him back to you. It is not possible for a man to be recalled from his purpose by harshness and severity; demon cannot drive out demon. You will bring him back to you better by kindness. That is how God acts for our good, and draws us to himself.'

He told him this story: In the Thebaid were two brothers. When one of them began to suffer lust, he said to the other: 'I am going back to the world.' The other wept and said, 'I won't let you go away, my brother, to lose your toil and your chastity.' But he refused to listen and said, 'I am not staying here: I am going. Either come with me, and I will return with you, or let me go, and I will remain in the world.' The brother came and told this to a great hermit. The hermit said to him, 'Go with him, and because of your effort, God will not let him perish.' So he went with him to the world. When they came to a village, God looked on the efforts of him who followed his brother out of love and took away the other brother's passion. He said to his brother, 'Let us go back to the desert, my brother. Look, I imagine that I have already sinned with a woman and what have I got out of it?' So they returned to their cell unharmed.

29. A brother, being tempted by a demon, went to a hermit and said, 'Those two monks over there who live together live sinfully.' But the hermit knew that a demon was deceiving him. So he called the brothers to him. In the evening he put out a mat for them, and covered them with a single blanket, and said, 'They are sons of God, and holy persons.' But he said to his disciple, 'Shut this slandering brother up in a cell by himself; he is suffering from the passion of which he accuses them.'

30. A brother said to a hermit, 'What am I to do, for these foul thoughts are killing me?' The hermit said to him, 'When a mother wants to wean her baby, she smears something bitter on her breasts: and when the infant comes as usual to suckle, he tastes the bitterness

and is repelled. So you ought to put bitterness into your thought.' The brother said to him, 'What bitterness is this?' The hermit said to him, 'The thought of death and torment, which is prepared in the next world for sinners.'

31. A brother asked a hermit about thoughts of this kind. The hermit said, 'I have never been tempted by that.' The brother was scandalized by him, and went to a second hermit and said, 'Look here, that hermit said this to me and I am shocked, because it is unnatural.' He said to him, 'The meaning of the words of that man of God isn't on the surface. Go and apologize to him and he will show you the power in his words.' So the brother went to the hermit, and apologized to him. He said, 'Forgive me, abba, I was a fool, and did not say goodbye to you when I left. I beg you, explain to me how it is that you are not troubled by lust.' He said to him, 'The reason is this: ever since I became a monk, I have never taken my fill of bread, or water, or sleep, and because I am tormented by desire for food, I cannot feel the pricks of lust.' So the brother went away, having profited by the words of the hermit.

32. A brother asked a hermit, 'What can I do? My mind is always thinking about fornication; and does not let me rest even for an hour, and my heart is suffering.' So the hermit said to him, 'When the demons sow thoughts in your heart, and you feel this, don't listen to your heart, for that is the demons' suggestion. Though the demons are careful to send thoughts to you, they do not force you to accept them. It is up to you to receive or reject them. Do you know what the Midianites did? They decked their daughters, and set them where the Israelites could see them: but they did not force them to intermingle; it was as each one wished. Others were wrathful and uttered threats, and avenged the act of whoredom with the death of those who had dared do it. This is what should be done with the lust that rises in us.' But the brother replied, 'What am I to do, if I am weak, and this passion masters me?' The hermit said, 'This is the way to be strong: when temptations start to speak in your mind do not answer them but get up, pray, do penance, and say "Son of God, have mercy upon me." ' But the brother said, 'Look here, abba, I meditate on such words, but they do not help me to be penitent, for I do not know the meaning of the words on which I am meditating.' The hermit said, 'Well, go on meditating. I have heard that Poemen and other monks said that a snake-charmer does not know the meaning of his words: but the snake hears them, and knows their meaning, and obeys the charmer and lies down. So though we do not know the meaning of the words, the demons hear, and are afraid and flee.'

33. A hermit used to say, 'A lustful thought is brittle like papyrus. When it is thrust at us, if we do not accept it but throw it away it

breaks easily. If it allures us and we keep playing with it, it becomes as difficult to break as iron. We need discernment to know that those who consent lose hope of salvation and for those who do not consent, a crown is made ready.'

34. Two brothers who were attacked by lust went away and married wives. Afterwards they said to each other, 'What have we done? We have ceased to live like angels and have lost purity, and later on we will come to fire and torment. Let us go back to the desert, and do penance for our fault.' They went to the desert, and asked the fathers to accept them, and confessed what they had done. The monks shut them up for a whole year, and gave them each an equal amount of bread and water. Now they were alike in appearance and at the end of the year's penance, they came out. The fathers saw that one looked pale and melancholy, the other strong and bright. They were astonished, for they had been given the same quantity of food and drink. They said to the man who was sad and troubled, 'What did you think about while you were in that cell?' He said, 'I was thinking about the punishment I shall incur for the evil I have done; I was so afraid that my bones cleaved to my flesh.' Then they asked the other, 'What were you thinking while you were in the cell?' He said, 'I was thanking God that he has saved me from pollution in this world and punishment in the next, and has called me back to live here like the angels and I thought continually on my God and was glad.' The monks said, 'The penitence of both men is equal before God.'

35. In Scetis there was a hermit who became gravely ill, and was nursed by the brothers. When the hermit saw how much they did for him, he said, 'I'd better go to Egypt, and then I shan't be a trouble to these brothers.' Moses said to him, 'Don't go; you will fall into lust.' Now the hermit was vexed by this and said, 'My body is dead. How can you say that to me?' So he got up and went to Egypt. When the inhabitants in Egypt heard that he had arrived, they brought him many gifts. A pious maiden came to him, wishing to minister to him because he was ill. After a short time he recovered somewhat from the illness which had gripped him, and he lay with her, and she conceived. When her neighbours asked her who the father was, she said, 'This hermit,' but they did not believe her. Then the hermit said, 'Yes, I am the father. Keep the baby for me when it is born.' When the baby had been weaned, the hermit carried it on his shoulders, and arrived at Scetis on a feast day; he went into church in front of all the brothers. When they saw him, they wept. He said to them, 'Do you see this baby? He is the child of disobedience. Beware, my brothers, remember what I have done though I am old, and pray for me.' Going to his cell, he returned to his earlier way of life.

36. A brother was sorely tempted by the demon of fornication. Four

demons appeared before him like beautiful women, and attacked him continuously for forty days. He fought like a man, and was not overcome. Seeing how good a fight he put up, God gave him grace not to suffer the sting of bodily passion ever again.

37. In lower Egypt there was a very famous hermit, who lived alone in his cell. It happened that by Satan's wiles a harlot heard of him, and said to the young men, 'What will you give me, if I seduce that hermit?' They agreed to give her a present. In the evening she came to his cell pretending she had lost her way. When she knocked at his door, he came out and seeing her, he was troubled, and said, 'What have you come here for?' She pretended to weep, and said, 'I've lost my way.' He felt truly sorry for her, and led her into the little courtyard, and went himself to the inner room of his cell and shut the door. She cried aloud, 'Abba, the beasts will eat me here.' Again he was anxious, and afraid of the judgement of God and he said to himself, 'Why has God's wrath come on me like this?' He opened his door and brought her inside. Then the devil began to goad his heart to desire her. He knew that it was the devil's goading, and said silently, 'The ways of the enemy are darkness, but the Son of God is light.' He got up and lit the lamp. When he began to burn with desire, he said, 'People who do things like this go into torment. Test yourself, and see whether you can bear a fire which is everlasting.' Then he put his finger in the flame of the lamp and he burnt it, but he did not notice the pain because of the fire of passion within him. So, until the dawn came, he burnt his fingers one after the other. The wretched woman saw what he was doing, and in terror she lay as still as a stone. At dawn the young men came to the monk and said, 'Did a woman come here yesterday evening?' He said: 'Yes, she is asleep over there.' They went in, and found her dead. They said, 'Abba, she is dead.' Then he turned back the cloak that he was wearing, and showed them his hands, and said, 'Look what that child of the devil has done to me. She has cost me every finger I possess.' He told them what had happened, and said, 'It is written, "Render not evil for evil" (1 Pet. 3:9).' He prayed, and restored her to life. She was converted and lived chastely for the rest of her days.

38. A brother was assailed by lust. By chance he came to a village in Egypt, and saw the daughter of the pagan priest there, and he fell in love with her. He said to her father, 'Give her to me to be my wife.' He answered, 'I cannot give her to you until I have consulted my gods.' He went to the demon whom he served and said, 'Here is a monk wanting to marry my daughter. Shall I give her to him?' The demon replied, 'Ask him if he denies his God, his baptism, and his monastic vows.' The priest came and said to the monk, 'If you deny your God, and your baptism, and your monastic vows I will give you

my daughter.' The monk agreed. At once he saw something like a dove fly out of his mouth and up into the sky. Then the priest went to the demon and said, 'He has promised to do the three things you said.' Then the devil answered, 'Do not give your daughter to be his wife, for his God has not left him, but will still help him.' So the priest went back and said to the monk, 'I cannot give her to you, because your God is still helping you, and has not left you.' When the monk heard his, he said in himself, 'If God has shown me such kindness, though like a wretch I have denied him, and my baptism and my monastic vows, if God is so good that he still helps me though I am wicked, why am I running away from him?' He came to his senses and went into the desert to a great hermit, and told him what had happened. The hermit said, 'Stay with me in this cave, and fast for three weeks, and I will pray to God for you.' The hermit worked hard on behalf of the brother and said to God, 'I beg you, O Lord, grant me this soul, and accept its penitence.' God heard his prayer. At the end of the first week, the hermit came to the brother and asked him, 'Have you seen anything?' The brother replied, 'Yes, I saw a dove in the sky over my head.' The hermit said, 'Look into your heart, and pray to God earnestly.' After the second week the hermit came again to the brother, and asked him, 'Have you seen anything?' He replied, 'I have seen a dove coming down towards my head.' Then the hermit urged him, 'Pray, and pray seriously.' At the end of the third week, the hermit came again and asked him, 'Have you seen anything else?' He replied, 'I saw a dove and it came and sat on my head, and I stretched out my hand to catch it, and it entered my mouth.' The hermit thanked God and said to the brother, 'See, God has accepted your penitence. In future be careful, and on your guard.' The brother answered, 'I will stay with you now, until I die.'

39. One of the hermits in the Thebaid used to say that he was the son of a pagan priest, and as a little boy he had often seen his father go into the temple and sacrifice to the idol. Once, when he had crept in secretly, he had seen Satan on his throne, with his host standing round him, and one of his chief captains came and bowed before him. The devil said, 'Where have you come from?' He answered, 'I was in such and such a province, and there I stirred up wars and riots, and much blood was spilt, and I have come to tell you.' The devil asked him, 'How long did it take you?' He answered, 'A month.' Then the devil said, 'Why on earth did you take so long over it?' and ordered him to be beaten. Then a second came to bow before him and the devil said to him, 'Where have you been?' The demon replied, 'I was in the sea, and I raised storms, and sank ships, and drowned many, and have come to tell you.' The devil said, 'How long did that take you?' He answered, 'Twenty days.' The devil said, 'Why ever did you take so

long over this one task?’ and ordered him also to be flogged. Then a third came and bowed to him and the devil said to him, ‘What have you been up to?’ He answered, ‘I was in such and such a city: and during a wedding I stirred up quarrelling until the parties came to bloody blows, and in the end even the husband was killed, and I have come to let you know.’ The devil said, ‘How long did it take you?’ He answered, ‘Ten days.’ The devil commanded him also to be flogged because he had been idle. Another came to adore him, and he said: ‘Where have you been?’ He answered, ‘I was in the desert: and for forty years I have been attacking one monk. At last in the night I prevailed, and made him lust.’ When the devil heard this, he got up and kissed him. Taking off his own crown, he put it on his head, and made him sit with him on a throne, and said, ‘You have been brave, and done a great deed.’ When I heard and saw this, I said to myself, ‘Great indeed is the discipline of the monks.’ So it pleased God to grant me salvation: and I went out, and became a monk.

40. They said of one monk that he had lived in the world and had turned to God, but was still goaded by desire for his wife; and he told this to the monks. When they saw him to be a man of prayer and one who did more than his duty, they laid on him a course of discipline which so weakened his body that he could not even stand up. By God’s providence another monk came to visit Scetis. When he came to this man’s cell he saw it open, and he passed on, surprised that no one came to meet him. But then he thought that perhaps the brother inside was ill, and returned, and knocked on the door. After knocking, he went in, and found the monk gravely ill. He said, ‘What’s the matter, abba?’ He explained, ‘I used to live in the world, and the enemy still troubles me because of my wife. I told the monks, and they laid on me various burdens to discipline my life. In trying to carry them out obediently, I have fallen ill and yet the temptation is worse.’ When the visiting hermit heard this, he was vexed, and said, ‘These monks are powerful men, and meant well in laying these burdens upon you. But if you will listen to me who am but a child in these matters, stop all this discipline, take a little food at the proper times, recover your strength, join in the worship of God for a little, and turn your mind to the Lord. This desire is something you can’t conquer by your own efforts. The human body is like a coat. If you treat it carefully, it will last a long time. If you neglect it, it will fall to pieces.’ The sick man did as he was told, and in a few days the incitement to lust vanished.

41. A very old hermit, of saintly life, lived on a mountain near Antinoë, and helped many people towards sanctity by his teaching and example, or so I have been told by well-known monks. Because he was saintly, the devil was stirred to envy him, as he envies all men of

true goodness. So the devil sent into his heart the thought that if he was really the man he wanted to be, he ought not to let others minister to his needs, but ought to be ministering to theirs or at least, if he could not minister to the needs of others, he ought to minister to his own needs. So the devil said, 'Go to the town and sell the basket you are making, and buy what you need, and come back to your cell, and so be a burden to no one.' Now the devil suggested this because he envied his stillness and his opportunity of leisure to hear God, and the good which he did to so many people. All round him the enemy was scurrying, hurling darts at him, trying to capture him. He assented to what he believed to be a good thought, and came down from his hermitage. Everyone admired him and recognized him when they saw him, but did not know that he was entangled in the devil's net. After a long time he saw a woman. Because he was being careless, he was overthrown, and lay with her. Then he went into a desert place, with the devil at his heels, and fell down by a river. He thought that the enemy rejoiced at his ruin, and he wanted to despair, because he had sorely grieved the Spirit of God, and the holy angels, and the venerable fathers, many of whom had overcome the devil though they lived in towns. Because he could not become like them, he was utterly downcast; and he forgot that God is a God who gives strength to them who devoutly turn to him. Blinded, and seeing no way to cure his sin, he wanted to throw himself in the river which would have filled the enemy's cup to overflowing. In the agony of his soul, his body began to sicken. Unless God in his mercy had helped him, he would have died impenitent, to the perfect satisfaction of the enemy. But at the last moment he came to his senses again. He resolved to inflict a severe penance upon himself, and pray to God in sorrow and grief and in this resolve he went back to his cell. He marked the door of his cell in the usual way which showed that the man inside was dead, and so he wept and prayed to God. He fasted, and watched, and became thin with his austerity and still he did not think he had made fit penance or satisfaction. When the brothers came to him to be taught, and knocked at the door, he said that he could not open it, 'I am bound by an oath to do penance for a whole year. Pray for me.' When they heard this, they were shocked, because they believed him to be truly honourable and great: but he found no means of explaining himself to them. For a whole year he fasted rigidly, and did penance. On Easter Eve, he took a new lamp and put it in a new pot, and covered it with a lid. At evening he stood up to pray, and said, 'Merciful, pitying Lord, who desires that barbarians be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, I flee to you, the Saviour of the faithful. Have mercy upon me because I moved you to anger, and pleased the enemy: I am dead, but obedient to you. Lord, you have mercy even on the wicked, even

the pitiless; you commanded us to show mercy to our neighbours; therefore have mercy upon me, humbled here before you. With you nothing is impossible, for at the mouth of hell my soul was scattered like dust. Have pity on what you have made because you are good and merciful; on the day of the resurrection you will raise up even the bodies of those who are not. Hear me, O Lord, for my spirit has failed, and my soul is wretched. I have polluted my body, and now I cannot live, because I had no faith. Look at my penitence and forgive my sin, a sin that was double because I despaired. Send life into me, for I am contrite and light this lamp with your fire. So I may be able to have confidence in your mercy and forgiveness, and so keep your commandments, remain in awe of you, and serve you more faithfully than before, for the rest of the life which you have given me.' On the night of Easter Eve he prayed like this and wept. He went to see if the lamp were lit. When he took off the lid, he saw that it was not. Again he fell on his face and besought God, 'I know, O God, that when I lived a life of austerity for reward, I was not able to withstand, but rather chose the pleasures of the body and so I deserve the punishment of the wicked. But spare me, Lord. Here am I and again I confess my disgrace to you who are all-goodness, and in the presence of your angels, and of all just men; I would confess to all mankind, if I would not cause them thereby to stumble. Lord, have mercy upon me, and I will teach others. Lord, send life into me.' When he had prayed three times, God heard his prayer. He looked and found the lamp burning brightly. His heart leapt with hope and happiness, and he worshipped God who had forgiven his sins, and answered his soul's prayer. He said, 'Thank you, O Lord, for having mercy on one who is not worthy to live in this world, and for giving me confidence by this great new sign of your power. You are merciful and spare the souls which you created.' He was still praying like this when the dawn came and forgetting his need for food, he rejoiced in the Lord. All his life he kept that lamp alight, pouring in oil from the top to prevent it going out. So, once again, God's Spirit dwelt within him, and he was famous among all the monks, and showed humility and joy in his praise and thanksgiving to God. A few days before his death it was revealed to him that he should pass over into life.

POSSESSING NOTHING

1. A brother was leaving the world, and though he gave his goods to the poor he kept some for his own use. He went to Antony, and when Antony knew what he had done, he said, 'If you want to be a monk, go to the village over there, buy some meat, hang it on your naked body and come back here.' The brother went, and dogs and birds tore at his body. He came back to Antony, who asked him if he had done what he was told. He showed him his torn body. Then Antony said, 'Those who renounce the world but want to keep their money are attacked in that way by demons and torn in pieces.'

2. Daniel told this story about Arsenius. An official once came to bring him the will of a kinsman who was a senator and had left Arsenius a large bequest. Arsenius took the will in his hands and wanted to tear it up. But the official fell at his feet, and said, 'Please do not tear it up; they will blame me.' Arsenius said to him, 'I died before he did. Now that he is dead, how can he make me his heir?' He gave back the will, and would accept nothing.

3. Once when Arsenius was in Scetis he became ill, and he needed just one penny. He had not got one, so he accepted it as alms from someone else, and said, 'Oh God, thank you! For your name's sake you have made me worthy to come to this, that I should have to ask for alms.'

4. They told this story about Agatho. He and his disciples spent a long time in building his cell. When they had finished it he lived in it, but in the first week he saw a vision which seemed harmful to him. So he said to his disciples what the Lord said to his apostles, 'Rise, let us go hence' (John 14:31). But the disciples were exasperated and said, 'If you meant the whole time to move from here, why did we have to work so hard and spend so long in building you a cell? People will begin to be shocked by us, and say: "Look, they are moving again, they are restless and never settle." ' When Agatho saw that they were afraid of what people would say, he said, 'Although some may be shocked, there are others who will be edified and say, "Blessed are they, for they have moved their abode for God's sake, and left all their property freely." Whoever wants to come with me, let him come; I am going anyway.' They bowed down on the ground before him, and begged to be allowed to go with him.

5. Evagrius said that there was a brother who had no possessions

except a Gospel book and he sold it in order to feed the poor. He said something worth remembering: 'I have sold even the word that commands me to sell all and give to the poor.'

6. Theodore, surnamed Pherme, had three good books. He went to Macarius, and said, 'I have three good books, and I am helped by reading them. Other monks also want to read them, and they are helped by them. Tell me what to do.' Macarius replied, 'Reading books is good, but possessing nothing is more than anything.' When he heard this, he went and sold the books, and gave the money to the poor.

7. One of the monks told this story about John the Persian, how because of his many virtues he attained a deep simplicity and innocence. He lived in the part of Arabia that is near to Egypt. Once he borrowed a shilling from another monk and bought linen with which to make things. A brother came and asked him, 'Abba, give me a little linen, and I will make myself a shirt to wear.' John gave it him gladly. Then another came and asked him for a little linen, so that he could make himself a coat and he gave it him. Many others came and he gave simply and cheerfully. Later the owner of the borrowed shilling arrived and asked for his money back. John said to him, 'I will get it for you.' When he could not find anything with which to pay, he went to Jacob the steward to ask him for a shilling. On the way he found a shilling lying on the ground. He did not touch it, but said a prayer, and went back to his cell. Again the owner of the shilling he had borrowed came and began to speak harshly to him asking for his money. John said, 'I will give it back to you.' John went away again and found the shilling still lying on the ground; again he prayed, and went back to his cell. Then the owner began to be demanding and he said, 'Wait for me just once more, and I will bring you your shilling.' He went to that place where he had found the shilling on the ground. He said a prayer, and picked it up, and went to Jacob and said, 'Abba, on my way here I found this shilling on the ground. Of your kindness, tell all the neighbours, to see if anyone has lost it.' Then Jacob summoned everyone and announced the find, but they could discover no one who had lost it. Then John said to Jacob, 'If no one has lost it, give it to that monk there, because I owe him a shilling.' Jacob was astonished that when John was being pressed to pay his debt he had not picked the shilling up at once when he found it and used it in payment.

There was another remarkable thing about John. If anyone came to borrow something from him, he did not take it in his own hands and lend it, but said, 'Come in, take what you need.' When a borrower brought anything back, John used to say, 'Put it back where you found it.' If a man borrowed something and did not bring it back, John said nothing to him about it.

8. It was said that a monk once came to the congregation at Cellia and went to see Isaac wearing a small hood. The hermit rebuked him, saying, "This is where monks live. You are a man of the world, you cannot stay here."

9. Isaac said to the brothers, "Pambo and our predecessors used to wear old and much-patched clothes. You wear good clothes. Go away, you do not belong here." When they were starting out for the harvest, he said, "I shall give you no more orders, for you never obey me."

10. Cassian said that Syncleticus renounced the world, and divided his property among the poor. But he kept some for his own use, and so he showed that he was unwilling to accept either the poverty of those who renounce everything or the normal rule of monasteries. Basil of blessed memory said to him, "You have stopped being a senator, but you have not become a monk."

11. A brother said to Pistamon, "What am I to do? I am anxious when I sell what I make." Pistamon replied, "Sisois and others used to sell what they made. There is no harm in this. When you sell anything, say straight away the price of the goods. If you want to lower the price a little, you may and so you will find peace." The brother said, "I have enough for my needs from other sources, do you think I need worry about making things to sell?" Pistamon answered, "However much you have, do not stop making things, do as much as you can, provided that your soul is at peace."

12. A brother said to Serapion, "Give me a word." But he replied, "What can I say to you? You have taken what belongs to widows and orphans and put it on your window-ledge." He saw that the window-ledge was full of books.

13. Syncletica of blessed memory was asked, "Is absolute poverty perfect goodness?" She replied, "It is a great good for those who can do it. Even those who cannot bear it find rest to their souls though they suffer bodily anxiety. As strong clothes are laundered pure white by being turned and trodden under foot in water, a strong soul is strengthened by freely accepting poverty."

14. Hyperichius said, "To accept poverty freely is the monk's treasure. Therefore, my brother, lay up treasure in heaven, where there will be endless time for rest."

15. One of the holy men named Philagrius lived in Jerusalem and worked hard to earn himself enough to eat. When he was standing in the market square trying to sell what he had made, a bag containing a great many coins fell on the ground near him by accident. Philagrius found it, and stood there thinking, "The loser must soon come back." Soon the man who had lost it did come back, very gloomy. So Philagrius took him aside and gave him back his bag. The owner

wanted to give him some of the money, but the hermit would not take anything. Then the owner began to call out, 'Come and see what the man of God has done.' But Philagrius escaped unnoticed, and went out of the town, so that they should not know what he had done, nor pay him honour.

16. A brother asked a hermit, 'What must I do to be saved?' He took off his clothes, and put a girdle about his loins and stretched out his hands and said, 'Thus ought the monk to be: stripped naked of everything, and crucified by temptation and combat with the world.'

17. Someone asked a hermit to accept money for his future needs but he refused, because the produce of his labour was enough for him. When the giver persisted, and begged him to take it for the needs of the poor, he replied, 'If I did that my disgrace would be twofold. I do not need it, yet I would have accepted it: and when I gave it to others, I would suffer from vanity.'

18. Some Greeks once came to give alms in the city of Ostracinus: and they asked the stewards of the church to show them who was most in need. The stewards led them to a leper to whom they offered money. But he did not want it, and said, 'Look here, I have a few palm leaves to work, and I plait them, and so I get enough to eat.' Then the stewards took them to the house of a widow who lived with her daughters. When they knocked on the door, one of the daughters ran to open it although she was naked. Her mother had gone out to work as a laundress. They offered the daughter clothing and money. But she refused to accept it, and said that her mother had told her, 'Trust in God's will. Today I have found work to supply us with enough to live on.' When the mother came back, they asked her to accept alms but she refused and said: 'I have my God to care for me. Do you want to take him away from me now?' They realized her faith, and glorified God.

19. A great man came from a distance to Scetis carrying gold, and he asked the presbyter of the desert to distribute it among the brothers. But the presbyter said to him, 'The brothers do not need it.' But he was very pressing, and would not give way, and put a basket of money in the church porch. So the presbyter said, 'Whoever is in need may take money from here.' No one touched it, some did not even look at it. The presbyter said, 'God has accepted your offering to him. Go away and give it to the poor.' He went away very much edified.

20. Someone brought a hermit who was a leper some money and said, 'Take this to spend, for you are old and ill.' He replied, 'Are you going to take me away from Him who has fed me for sixty years? I have been ill all that time, and have needed nothing because God has fed me and given me what I need.' He would not accept it.

21. They said there was a working gardener who gave away all his profit in alms, and kept for himself only enough to live on. Later on Satan tempted him and said, 'Store up a little money, as a provision to spend when you are old and infirm.' So he made a store of coins in a big pot. It happened that he fell ill, and his foot became gangrenous, and he spent all his coins on doctors, but grew no better. An experienced doctor told him, 'Unless we amputate your foot, the gangrene will spread through your whole body.' So they decided to amputate it. But the night before the operation, the gardener came to his senses, and was sorry for what he had done, and groaned and wept saying, 'Lord, remember my earlier good works when I worked in the garden and served the poor.' Then an angel of the Lord stood before him and said, 'Where is your store of coins? Where has your trust in them gone to?' Then he understood, and said, 'I have sinned, Lord, forgive me, I will not do it again.' Then the angel touched his foot, and it was healed at once. He got up at dawn, and went to the fields to work. At the appointed time the surgeon came with his instruments to amputate the foot. The people told him, 'He went out at dawn to work in the fields.' The doctor was astonished and went out to the field where he was working, and he saw him digging, and glorified God who had restored his health.

22. A brother asked a hermit, 'Would you like me to keep two shillings for myself, in case I fall ill?' The hermit, seeing that in his heart he wanted to keep them, said, 'Yes.' The brother went into his cell, but he was worried, asking himself, 'Did he tell me the truth or not?' He got up and went back to the hermit, bowed down and asked him, 'For the Lord's sake tell me the truth, for I am worrying about those two shillings.' The hermit said to him, 'I told you to keep them because I saw you intended to do so anyway. But it is not good to have more than the body needs. If you keep two shillings, you will put your hope in them. If by chance they are lost, then God will no longer be interested in your needs. Let us cast all our care upon the Lord, for He cares for us.'

1. Once when Antony was living in the desert his soul was troubled by boredom and irritation. He said to God, 'Lord, I want to be made whole and my thoughts do not let me. What am I to do about this trouble, how shall I be cured?' After a while he got up and went outside. He saw someone like himself sitting down and working, then standing up to pray; then sitting down again to make a plait of palm leaves, and standing up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct Antony and make him vigilant. He heard the voice of the angel saying, 'Do this and you will be cured.' When he heard it he was very glad and recovered his confidence. He did what the angel had done, and found the salvation that he was seeking.

2. A brother asked Agatho, 'I have been instructed to go somewhere, and I have serious doubts about the place where I have been told to go. I want to obey the order, yet I'm frightened of the inner struggle which will follow.' The hermit said, 'Agatho was like that. He obeyed orders, and so he won the battle.'

3. Ammonas said that for fourteen years in Scetis he had been asking God day and night to give him strength to control his temper.

4. Bessarion said that for forty nights he had stood among thorns and had not slept.

5. A hermit who was anxious went to Theodore of Pherme and told him all about it. He said to him, 'Humble yourself, put yourself in subjection, go and live with others.' So he went to a mountain, and there lived with a community. Later he returned to Theodore and said, 'Not even when I lived with other men did I find rest.' He said to him, 'If you're not at rest as a hermit, nor when you're in a community, why did you want to be a monk? Wasn't it in order to suffer? Tell me, how many years have you been a monk?' He said, 'Eight.' Theodore said, 'Believe me, I've been a monk for seventy years, and I've not been able to get a single day's peace. Do you expect to have peace after only eight years?'

6. A brother asked Theodore, 'If you suddenly hear the sound of falling masonry, are you frightened, abba?' He said, 'If the heavens fell down on the earth, Theodore would not be afraid.' For he had prayed to God that fear might be taken from him. That was why the brother questioned him.

7. They said about Theodore and Lucius from the town of Alexandria that for fifty years they strengthened themselves like this. They used to say, 'When this winter is over, we will move from here,' then in the summer they would say, 'At the end of the summer let us go away.' Those renowned monks lived their whole life devoutly in this way.

8. Poemen said about John the Short that he asked the Lord to take away his passions. So his heart was at rest, and he went to a hermit and said, 'I find that I am at peace, with no war between flesh and spirit.' The hermit said to him, 'Go and ask the Lord to stir up a new war in you. Fighting is good for the soul.' When the conflict revived in him, he no longer prayed for it to be taken away, but said, 'Lord, grant me strength to endure this fight.'

9. Macarius the Great came to Antony on the mountain. When he knocked at the door, Antony went out and said, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I am Macarius.' Antony went in and shut the door, and left Macarius outside. Afterwards, when he saw how patiently he waited, he opened the door to him and welcomed him saying, 'I have heard of you, and for a long time I have wanted to see you.' He was hospitable and refreshed him, for Macarius was tired with his hard work. In the evening Antony put out a few palm leaves for himself. Macarius said to him, 'Give me some, so that I can work at them.' Antony said, 'I only have these.' So he made a pile of what he had, and they sat late, talking to the good of their souls, and made a plaited rope, and the rope hung out of the window in the cave. At dawn Antony went out and saw the plait which Macarius had made, and he marvelled and kissed his hand, saying, 'There is great virtue in those plaits.'

10. This same Macarius once went down from Scetis to a place named Terenuthis, and he climbed into an old pagan burial place to sleep. He put one of the bodies under his head as a pillow. The demons hated him when they saw his assurance and tried to frighten him by calling out, 'Lady, come with us to bathe.' Another demon answered from underneath Macarius, as though he were the dead woman, 'I have a pilgrim on top of me, and can't move.' Macarius was not frightened, but confidently thumped the body, saying, 'Get up and go if you can.' When the demons heard it, they cried out and said, 'You have defeated us,' and they fled in confusion.

11. Mathois said, 'I like to find some light but continual work, rather than a heavy work that is quickly finished.'

12. They said of Milidus, that while he was living on the frontiers of Persia with two disciples, two sons of the emperor came on their usual hunting expedition, and put nets round an area of forty miles, and speared whatever they trapped. They found the monk and his disciples within this area. When they saw his hairy and forbidding face, they

were astonished and said, 'Are you a man or a demon?' He said, 'I am a sinful man, and I have come out here to repent of my sins. I worship Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.' They said to him, 'There is no god but sun, fire and water. Worship them and sacrifice to them.' He replied, 'You are wrong, they are only creatures. I beg you, be converted and recognize the true God who made these and everything else.' But they mocked him and said, 'Are you saying that the true God is a condemned and crucified man?' 'Yes,' said Milidus, 'I say that the true God is He who crucified sin and killed death.' So they tortured him and the two monks to force them to sacrifice. After many tortures they beheaded the two monks but they went on torturing Milidus day after day. Then they fastened him in one place and fired arrows into him, one in front and one behind, so that he looked like a signpost. He said to them, 'Because you have conspired to shed innocent blood, tomorrow, at this very moment of the day, your mother shall lose her children and your care for her, and you will spill each other's blood with your own arrows.' They thought his words were nonsense and next day went out again to hunt. It happened that a stag escaped from their net, and they mounted their horses and chased him. Each fired an arrow which hit the heart of the other, and so they died as Milidus had foreseen.

13. Poemen said, 'The character of the genuine monk only appears when he is tempted.'

14. Poemen also said this: Isidore, the presbyter in Scetis, once spoke to a group of monks and said, 'My brothers, isn't work the reason why we are here? But now I see that no work is done here. So I will take my cloak and go where there is work and so I shall find rest.'

15. Syncletica said, 'If you live in a monastic community, do not wander from place to place; if you do, it will harm you. If a hen stops sitting on the eggs she will hatch no chickens. The monk or nun who goes from place to place grows cold and dead in faith.'

16. She also said, 'When the devil does not use the goad of poverty to tempt us, he uses wealth for the same purpose. When he cannot win by scorn and mockery, he tries praise and flattery. If he cannot win by giving health, he tries illness. If he cannot win by comfort, he tries to ruin the soul by vexations that lead us to act against our monastic vows. He inflicts severe sicknesses on people whom he wants to tempt and so makes them weak, and thereby shakes the love they feel towards God. But although the body is shattered and running a high temperature and thirsting unbearably, yet you, who endure all this, are a sinner; you should therefore remember the punishments of the next world, the everlasting fire, the torments of judgement. Then you will not fail in the sufferings of this present time, indeed you should rejoice because God has visited you. Keep saying the famous text:

“The Lord hath chastened and corrected me: but he hath not given me over unto death” (Ps. 118:18). Iron is cleaned of rust by fire. If you are righteous and suffer, you grow to a higher sanctity. Gold is tested by fire. When a messenger from Satan is given to you to be a thorn in your flesh, lift up your heart, for you have received a gift like that of St Paul. If you suffer from fever and cold, remember the text of Scripture, “We went through fire and water,” and “thou broughtest us out into a place of rest” (Ps. 66:12). If you have overcome suffering, you may expect rest, provided you are following what is good. Cry aloud the prophet’s words, “I am poor and destitute and in misery” (Ps. 66:29). Threefold suffering like this shall make you perfect. He said also, “Thou hast set me at liberty when I was in trouble” (Ps. 4:1). So let this kind of self-discipline test our souls, for our enemy is always in sight.’

17. Syncletica also said, ‘If you are troubled by illness, do not be miserable, even if you are so ill that you cannot stand to pray or use your voice to say psalms. We need these tribulations to destroy the desires of our body; they serve the same purpose as fasting and austerity. If your senses are dulled by illness, you do not need to fast. In the same way that a powerful medicine cures an illness, so illness itself is a medicine to cure passion. A great deal is gained spiritually by bearing illness quietly and giving thanks to God. If we go blind, let us not be upset. We have lost one means to excellence, yet we can contemplate the glory of God with the inward eyes of the soul. If we go deaf let us remember that we shall no longer hear a lot of silly talk. If suffering has weakened the strength of your hands, you still have inner strength against the enemy’s attacks. If the whole body is afflicted by disease, your spiritual health is still increasing.’

18. She also said, ‘Those in the world who commit crimes are thrown into prison against their will. For our sins, let us put ourselves under guard, and by willingly accepting it now we shall avoid punishment in the future. If you fast, you should beware of thinking that it is by weakening your body that you have fallen ill, for people who do not fast fall ill in the same way. If you have begun some good work, you should not be turned from it by the enemy’s attempts to hinder you, indeed your endurance will overthrow the enemy. Sailors beginning a voyage set the sails and look for a favourable wind, and later they meet a contrary wind. Just because the wind has turned, they do not throw the cargo overboard or abandon ship; they wait a while and struggle against the storm until they can set a direct course again. When we run into headwinds, let us put up the cross for our sail, and we shall voyage through the world in safety.’

19. They said of Sarah of blessed memory that for sixty years she lived on the bank of a river, and never looked at the water.

20. Hyperichius said, 'Keep praising God with hymns, and meditating continually, and so lighten the burden of the temptations that attack you. A traveller carrying a heavy burden stops from time to time to take deep breaths, and so makes the journey easier and the burden light.'

21. He also said, 'Temptations come to us in all kinds of ways. We ought to put on full armour, and then we shall seem to them to be expert soldiers when they attack us.'

22. A hermit said, 'If a man is tempted, sufferings crowd round him on all sides, and he becomes timid and begins to grumble.' He told this story: A certain temptation beset a brother who lived at Cellia and if anyone saw him, they did not greet him, or ask him into their cells. If he was short of bread, no one gave him any. If he was on his way back from harvesting, no one invited him in for refreshment in the usual way. Once when he had been reaping, he was parched with thirst and had nothing to eat in his cell. But in all these difficulties he kept on thanking God. God saw his patience and took away his inner struggle and gave him rest from his temptation. Immediately there was a knock on his door, and a man from Egypt was outside leading a camel laden with bread. When the brother saw it, he began to weep, and said, 'Lord, am I not worthy of even a little suffering?' Now that his trial was over, the brothers welcomed him in their cells and into the church, and refreshed him.

23. A hermit said, 'We do not make progress because we do not realize how much we can do. We lose interest in the work we have begun, and we want to be good without even trying.'

24. A brother asked a hermit, 'What am I to do? My thoughts will not let me sit alone in my cell even for an hour.' He said, 'My son, go back and stay in your cell, wash your hands, pray to God continually, turn your thoughts towards God: and let no one persuade you to go out of your cell.' He added this story: A boy who was living in the world with his father, decided to become a monk. Though he begged his father to allow it, the father kept refusing, but in the end, at the request of some devout friends, he consented grudgingly. The boy left home and entered a monastery. As soon as he had become a monk, he began to keep the monastic rule perfectly, and to fast every day. He even began to go without food for two days and to eat a proper meal only once a week. His abbot noticed this and marvelled, and thanked God for his self-discipline. After a short time it happened that the monk began to say to his abbot, 'Please let me go into the desert.' The abbot said, 'My son, don't think of it. You can't endure austerity like that, or the skill and temptation of the devil. When you are tempted in the desert, there is no one to comfort you in the troubles which the devil stirs up.' But the monk continued to ask him even more urgently

to let him go. His abbot, seeing that he could not hold him, said a prayer and let him go. Then the monk said to his abbot, 'Please give me a guide to show me the right way.' The abbot selected two monks from that monastery to go with him. For two days they walked through the desert, and then were exhausted with the heat. So they lay down and slept for a little. While they were asleep, an eagle swooped down and beat at them with its wings, then flew off a little way and alighted. They woke up and saw the eagle, and said, 'Here is your guide; get up and follow him.' The brother got up, said goodbye to the brothers and followed the eagle, which flew a little way and then alighted; on his approach it flew a little further; this went on for three hours. Then the eagle flew off to the right of the pursuing monk, and did not reappear. Nevertheless the monk went in that direction, and saw three palm-trees, a spring, and a little cave. He said, 'Here is the place God has made ready for me.' He went into the cave and stayed there, eating dates and drinking the water from the spring; for six years he lived there alone and saw no one. But one day the devil came to him disguised as a monk, with a stern expression on his face. The brother saw him and was frightened, and knelt down to pray. When he got up the devil said to him, 'Let us pray again, brother.' When they got up again, the devil said, 'How long have you been here?' He replied, 'Six years.' The devil said, 'This is amazing. You have been my neighbour, and I did not realize it until four days ago. I have a hermitage not far from here, and this is the first day in eleven years that I have left it, because I discovered that you were living near me. I thought about it, and said to myself, 'Shall I go to this man of God, and consult him for the good of my soul? I tell you, brother, we do no good sitting alone in our cells. We cannot receive the body and blood of Christ, and I am afraid that he will cast us away if we separate ourselves from that sacrament. But listen, brother, three miles from here is a monastery that has a priest. Let us go there every Sunday, or every other Sunday, and receive the body and blood of Christ, and then return to our cells.' The brother was persuaded by the devil's suggestion. On Sunday the devil came and said, 'Come on, it is time to go.' They went out and came to the monastery where the presbyter was, entered the church and began to pray. When the monk ended his prayers, he could not see his guide anywhere, and said to himself, 'Where he has gone? Has he had to go out?' He waited a while but his guide did not return. He went out of the church and looked round for him, but could not find him. So he asked the monks of the place, 'Where is the abba who came to church with me?' They said, 'We saw no one but you.' Then the brother knew that it had been a demon, and said, 'See the cunning by which the devil has drawn me out of my cell. Yet he cannot harm me, because I have come here for a

good reason. I shall receive the body and blood of Christ, and go back to my cell.' After mass in the church, the brother wanted to go back to his cell. But the abbot of the monastery kept him, saying, 'We will not let you go back until you have eaten with us.' So he shared their meal and went back to his cell. Then the devil came again, this time appearing like a young man of the world, and began to look him up and down from head to foot staring at him and saying to himself, 'Is this the man? No.' The brother said to him, 'Why are you staring at me?' The devil said, 'I think you do not recognize me. How should you know me after such a long time? I am the son of your father's neighbour. Is not your father's name this and your mother's that, and your sister's that, and your name that? Are not your two serving girls called such and such? But your mother and sister died three years ago. Now your father has died, and left his property to you, saying, "My son, who out of goodness left the world and followed God, is the only heir left to me, so I will leave him everything. If anyone is a prophet of the Lord and knows where he is, let him find him. Then my son can come and take my wealth and give it away to the poor for the good of my soul and his soul." Many people have been looking for you but could not find you. I was brought here accidentally by some work and recognized you. Do not delay, but come, sell everything and do what your father wanted.' The brother answered, 'I ought not to go back to the world.' The devil said, 'If you do not come and your wealth vanishes you will have to give an account of it before God. Surely I am saying nothing wrong in telling you to come and give money to the poor and needy like a good and generous man, and so prevent money left to the poor from being misappropriated by evil men and women? What is the difficulty about coming to give alms as your father wanted for the good of your soul, and then returning to your cell?' So he persuaded the brother to return to the world. He went with him as far as the town and left him. The brother was about to enter his father's house, as if it were the house of a dead man, when his father came out alive and well. He did not recognize his son, but said: 'Who are you?' The monk in his surprise could not say a word. His father began again to ask him who he was and where he came from. Then, in confusion, he said, 'I am your son.' His father said, 'Why have you come back?' He was ashamed to say why he had come, so he said, 'My affection for you made me return; I wanted to see you.' He stayed at home and soon he fell into fornication, and was severely punished by his father; he was miserable and did not repent but remained in the world. So I tell you, my brothers, that a monk never ought to let himself be persuaded by anyone to leave his cell.

25. In the desert some people came to a great hermit and said, 'How can you be content here with this severe way of life?' The hermit

replied, 'All the severity of my life here cannot compare with a day of the torment prepared for sinners in the next world.'

26. A hermit said, 'Our predecessors were reluctant to move from place to place, except perhaps for three reasons: first, if a man was angry with them and no amount of satisfaction would calm him down; secondly, if many praised them; and thirdly, if they were tempted to lust.'

27. A brother said to Arsenius, 'What shall I do, abba? My thoughts trouble me, telling me, "You cannot fast, nor work, nor visit the sick, because even these things are selfish." ' He saw that the devil had put these thoughts in his mind and said, 'Go, eat, drink and sleep, only do not leave your cell; remember that staying in the cell is what keeps a monk on the right path.' He did this for three days and then he began to be bored. So he found a few palm leaves and split them; the next day he began to make a plait from them. When he grew hungry, he said to himself, 'Here are a few more palm leaves. I shall lay them out before I eat.' After he had finished he said, 'I shall read a little before I eat.' When he had finished that, he said, 'I shall say a few psalms, and then I shall eat with a calm mind.' So step by step he made progress with God's help, until he came back to the right way. When he was sure he had received strength against evil thoughts, he overcame them.

28. A hermit was asked by a brother why, when he stayed in his cell, he suffered boredom. He answered, 'You have not yet seen the resurrection for which we hope, nor the torment of fire. If you had seen these, then you would bear your cell without boredom even if it was filled with worms and you were standing in them up to your neck.'

29. The brothers suggested to a hermit that he should take a break from his great labours. He answered, 'Believe me, my sons, if Abraham repented when he saw God's glorious gifts, should we not try to work even harder?'

30. A brother said to a hermit, 'My thoughts wander, and I am troubled.' He answered, 'Go on sitting in your cell, and your thoughts will come back from their wanderings. If a she-ass is tethered, her foal skips and gambols all round her but always comes back to the mother. It is like that for anyone who for God's sake sits patiently in his cell. Though his thoughts wander for a time, they will come back to Him again.'

31. A hermit lived in the desert twelve miles from the nearest water. Once, on his way to draw water, he was tired out. So he said, 'Why suffer this? I will come and live by the spring.' As soon as he said this, he turned round and saw a man following him and counting his steps.

He asked him, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I am an angel of the Lord, sent to count your steps and reward you.' When the hermit heard this, his resolve was strengthened, and he moved his cell five miles further from the spring.

32. It used to be said that if you were tempted where you were living, you should not leave the place at the time of the temptation. If you did leave it then, you would find that the temptation that you were fleeing would go with you to the next place. You should be patient till temptation is over, then you could leave without upsetting anyone or troubling others who lived there.

33. A brother was restless in his community and he was often irritated. So he said, 'I will go and live somewhere by myself. I will not be able to talk or listen to anyone and so I shall be at peace, and my passionate anger will cease.' He went out and lived alone in a cave. But one day he filled his jug with water and put it on the ground. Suddenly it happened to fall over. He filled it again, and again it fell. This happened a third time. In a rage he snatched up the jug and smashed it. Coming to his senses, he knew that the demon of anger had mocked him, and he said, 'Here am I by myself, and he has beaten me. I will return to the community. Wherever you live, you need effort and patience and above all God's help.' So he got up, and went back.

34. A brother asked a hermit, 'What am I to do, abba? I do nothing like a monk. I eat, drink and sleep as I like, I am much troubled by vile thoughts, I shift from task to task, and my mind wanders everywhere.' The hermit answered, 'Stay in your cell, and do what you can without anxiety. It is not much that you do now, yet it is the same as when Antony did mighty things in the desert. I trust God that whoever stays in his cell for God's sake, and guards his conscience, will be found where Antony is.'

35. A hermit was asked how a watchful monk could prevent himself from being shocked if he saw others returning to the world. He replied, 'A monk should remember hounds when they are hunting a hare. One of them glimpses the hare and gives chase, the others merely see a hound running, and run some way with him, then they get tired and go back to their tracks. Only the leading hound keeps up the chase until he catches the hare. He is not deterred by the others who give up, he thinks nothing of cliffs or thickets or brambles, he is often pricked and scratched by thorns, but he keeps on until he catches the hare. So the man who runs after the Lord Jesus aims unceasingly at the cross, and leaps over every obstacle in his way until he comes to the Crucified.'

36. A hermit said, 'A tree cannot bear fruit if it is often transplanted.'

So it is with the monk.'

37. When a brother was troubled by thoughts of leaving the monastery, he told this to his abbot. He said, 'Go and sit down, and entrust your body to your cell, as a man puts a precious possession into a safe, and do not go out of it. Then let your thoughts go where they will. Let your mind think what it likes, so long as it does not drive your body out of the cell.'

38. A hermit said, 'The monk's cell is the furnace in Babylon in which the three children found the Son of God. It is the pillar of cloud out of which God spoke to Moses.'

39. For nine years a brother was assailed by the temptation to leave his community. Every day he got ready to go and picked up the cloak in which he used to wrap himself at night. At evening he would say, 'I will go away tomorrow.' At dawn he would think, 'I ought to stay here and bear this temptation just today for the Lord's sake.' He did this every day for nine years, until the Lord took the temptation away.

40. A brother fell into temptation, and in his struggle he stopped keeping the monastic rule. When he later tried to start keeping the basics of the rule, he was hampered by his suffering; and he said to himself, 'When shall I be as I once was?' In this gloomy state of mind he could not make himself begin the monastic office. So he went to a hermit and told him what had been happening. When the hermit heard of his sufferings, he told him this story by way of example: A man had a plot of land. Through his carelessness brambles sprang up and it became a wilderness of thistles and thorns. Then he decided to cultivate it. So he said to his son, 'Go and clear that ground.' So the son went to clear it, and saw that the thistles and thorns had multiplied. So his resolve weakened, and he said, 'What a lot of time I should need to clear and weed all this.' So he lay down and went to sleep. He did this day after day. When his father came to see what he had done he found him doing nothing. He said to him, 'Why have you done nothing till now?' The boy said to his father, 'I was coming to work, father, when I saw this wilderness of thorn and thistle, and I was too intimidated to start, and so I lay on the ground and went to sleep.' Then his father said to him, 'Son, if you had cleared each day the area on which you lay down, your work would have advanced slowly and you would not have lost heart.' So the boy followed his father's advice and in a short time the plot was cultivated. The hermit added, 'So, brother, do a little work and do not be discouraged, and God will give you grace and bring you back to your proper way of life.' The brother went away and patiently did what the hermit had told him. So he found peace of mind, and made progress with the help of the Lord Christ.

41. There was a hermit who was often ill. But one year he did not fall ill and he was very upset and wept saying, 'The Lord has left me, and has not visited me.'

42. A hermit said that for nine years a brother was goaded by his thoughts to despair of his salvation. He judged himself and said, 'I have ruined myself, I have perished already, I will go back to the world.' On his journey he heard a voice saying, 'Those temptations which you endured for nine years were your crowns. Go back to your cell, and I will take these evil thoughts from you.' So he realized that it is not right to despair of oneself because of the temptations that come. If we use these thoughts well they will give us a crown.

43. A hermit was living in a cave in the Thebaid with one well-tested disciple. It was usual for him to teach the disciple during the evening and show him how the soul should progress, and after the address he used to pray and send him away to sleep. Some devout laymen who knew of the hermit's ascetic life happened to visit him. He gave them counsel and they went away. Then he sat down after the evening prayers as usual to instruct the brother. But while he was talking, sleep overcame him. The brother waited for the hermit to wake and end with the usual prayer. But he went on sleeping and the brother went on sitting for a long time and in the end the disciple felt he must go and sleep though he was uneasy about it. So he pulled himself together, and resisted the temptation, and went back to sit by the hermit. A second time he was forced away by the longing for sleep, but he sat down again. This happened seven times, and still he went on resisting it. In the middle of the night the hermit woke up, and found him sitting nearby and said, 'Haven't you gone away yet?' He said, 'No, you did not send me away, abba.' The hermit said, 'Why did you not wake me up?' He answered, 'I did not dare to nudge you for fear of upsetting you.' They both got up and began to say the morning prayers. After that the hermit sent his disciple away. When the hermit was sitting alone, he was shown a vision of a glorious place, with a throne in it, and on the throne seven crowns. He asked the angel who showed him the vision, 'Whose crowns are those?' and he replied, 'They are the crowns of your disciple. God had given him this place and throne because of his goodness and tonight he has been granted these seven crowns.' The hermit was amazed and called his disciple to him with wonder and said, 'Tell me what you did all night.' He answered, 'Alas, abba, I did nothing.' The hermit could see that he was being humble and concealing something, and said, 'Look here, I can't rest until you tell me what you did and thought last night.' But the brother was not aware that he had done anything and could not say a word. Then at last he said to the hermit, 'Indeed, abba, I did nothing, except that seven times I was driven by wandering thoughts

to go away and sleep; but you had not sent me away as you usually do, so I did not go.' Then the hermit at once understood that every time he resisted the temptation, God bestowed a crown on him. To the disciple he said nothing, thinking it best for his soul, but he told other directors of souls, to teach us how God can bestow crowns upon us even for resisting little temptations. It is good that a man discipline his whole self for God's sake. As it is written, 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by storm' (Matt. 11:12).

44. Once a hermit fell ill. Because he had no one to look after him, he got up and ate whatever he found in his cell. Though this happened for several days, no one came to visit him. Even after a month no one had come. Then the Lord sent an angel to take care of him. After the angel had cared for him for a week, the monks remembered him and said to each other, 'Let us go and see if the hermit is ill.' They went to his cell: and the moment they knocked on the door, the angel left him. The hermit inside shouted, 'Go away, my brothers.' But they lifted the door off its hinges and went in, and asked him why he shouted. He said, 'For a month I was ill and no one visited me. Now for a week an angel of the Lord has taken care of me, but he went away the moment you arrived.' With these words, he died peacefully. The brothers wondered, and glorified God, saying: 'The Lord does not forsake them who trust in him' (Ps. 9:10).

45. A hermit said, 'If you fall ill, do not complain. If the Lord God has willed that your body should be weakened, who are you to complain about it? Does he not care for you in all your needs? Surely you would not be alive without him. Be patient in your illness and ask God to give you what is right, that is, that which will enable you to do his will, and be patient, and eat what you have in charity.'

46. One of the brothers said, 'When I was in Oxyrhynchus, the poor came on Friday evening to eat the love-feast. When they went to sleep afterwards, only one of them had a covering. He put half the blanket underneath him and the other half on top; but he was still very cold. When he went to relieve himself, I heard him grumbling and moaning about the cold and he consoled himself like this, "Thank you, Lord. How many wealthy men are in prison, sitting in irons or with shackled feet, so that they cannot even go out and relieve themselves when they want to. But I am like an emperor, I can stretch my legs and walk wherever I like." I was standing there and heard what he said and I went in and told the brothers, and they were very edified to hear it.'

47. A brother asked a hermit, 'If I were somewhere where there was no one whom I could consult about a temptation which afflicted me, no one who could show me the root causes of it in my soul, what could I do?' The hermit said, 'Trust in God, for he will send grace, and will himself be your consolation, if you ask him in charity.' He added,

‘I have heard a story about this from Scetis. There was a man who suffered temptation, and he had no confidence in any of the others, so he got his bundle ready to go away. But during the night he saw a vision of God’s grace in the form of a maiden, who said to him, “Do not go; stay here with me, for nothing bad will happen to you from what you have heard.” He believed her words, and stayed in his cell, and at once was healed inwardly.’

NOTHING DONE FOR SHOW

1. Antony once heard about how a young monk showed off on a journey. He saw some old men walking wearily along the road, and he ordered some donkeys to appear and carry them home. When the old men told Antony about this he said, 'I think that monk is like a ship laden with a rich cargo, but it is not yet certain that it will reach port in safety.' Shortly afterwards, Antony began to weep and pull his hair, and groan. When his disciples saw it, they said, 'Why are you weeping, abba?' He replied, 'A great pillar of the church has just fallen.' He said this about the young monk, and added, 'Walk over and see what has happened.' So his disciples went, and found the monk sitting on his mat and weeping for a sin that he had committed. When he saw Antony's disciples, he said, 'Tell the abba to pray God to give me just ten days, and I hope to be able to satisfy Him.' Within five days he was dead.

2. The monks praised a brother to Antony. Antony went to him and tested him to see if he could endure being insulted. When he saw that he could not bear it, he said to him, 'You are like a house with a highly decorated outside, but burglars have stolen all the furniture by the back door.'

3. They said of Arsenius and Theodore of Pherme that they hated fame and praise more than anything. Arsenius avoided people likely to praise him. Theodore did not avoid them, but their words were like daggers to him.

4. Archbishop John had a disciple named Eulogius. Eulogius was a presbyter and he used to fast for two days at a time, and sometimes ate nothing but bread and salt for a whole week, so he had a great reputation. He went to see Joseph at Panephrisis because he believed he would find more demanding discipline under him. Joseph welcomed him, and of his charity made ready what he had for them to eat. But the disciples of Eulogius said, 'The presbyter only eats bread and salt.' Joseph began to eat without comment. The visitors spent three days in silence, and they did not even hear the sound of psalms or prayers, for the disciples of Joseph were saying the office in private. Finally, Eulogius and his disciples went away, not edified. But by the providence of God, a mist came over the plain and they wandered in circles and by mistake they came back to Joseph's cell. Before they knocked on the door, they heard the singing of psalms

going on inside and they waited a long time outside listening. Then they knocked on the door, and Joseph welcomed them again. Eulogius was thirsty: and his disciples picked up a jug of water and gave it to him to drink. But the jug contained salt water mixed with fresh water and he could not drink it. When Eulogius had thought about this he began to ask Joseph to show him his way of life, saying: 'How is it, abba, that at first you didn't sing any psalms but began after we had gone away? And why was the water salt when I tried to drink it?' He replied, 'My disciple is away at work and I made a mistake and put salt water in the jug.' But Eulogius went on asking him, wanting to know the truth. So he told him the truth, 'That little cup is for the wine that we use in charity when we have guests. This is for the water that the brethren drink every day.' With these words he taught him to have discretion, and cleansed him from merely human motivation. So Eulogius became like other people, and in future ate what was put before him. He learnt to be severe only in secret, and said to Joseph, 'Indeed, your work is a work of love.'

5. Zeno (the disciple of Silvanus) said, 'Never stay in a well-known place nor sit with a famous man, nor lay a foundation on which you might sometime build yourself a cell.'

6. Once a brother came to Theodore of Pherme, and spent three days asking him for advice. Theodore did not answer, and he went sadly away. So Theodore's disciple asked him, 'Abba, why didn't you speak to him? Look, he has gone away sad.' He replied, 'As a matter of fact, I said nothing to him because he's only interested in getting credit by repeating what others have said to him.'

7. Another brother asked Theodore, 'Is it a good idea for me to go without bread for several days?' He said, 'You would do well. I have sometimes done that.' The brother said, 'Maybe I should take a few peas to the mill and make some vegetable meal?' Theodore said, 'If you go to the mill, why not make yourself some bread? There is no need to be carrying things to and fro.'

8. Another brother spoke with the same Theodore, and he began to talk about matters of which he had no experience. Theodore said to him, 'You've not yet found a ship to sail in, nor put your luggage aboard, nor put out to sea, and you're already acting as if you were in the city which you mean to reach. If you make some attempt to do the things you are discussing, then you can talk about them with understanding.'

9. Cassian said that a brother came to Serapion and the hermit asked him in the usual way to offer prayer. But he refused, saying that he was a sinner, and unworthy of the monk's habit. Serapion wanted to wash his feet, but he would not allow it, using the same words.

Serapion gave him a meal, and then began to talk to him gently, saying, 'Son, if you want to make progress, stay in your cell, keep a watch upon yourself and attend to the work of your hands. Nothing is more profitable to you than staying in your cell.' But when the brother heard this, he was furious, and the hermit could not help seeing his face change. So Serapion said to him, 'Just now you were saying "I am a sinner" and accusing yourself of being an unworthy monk. Then why were you angry when I gave you some loving advice? If you would be truly humble, learn to carry the burdens that others lay upon you bravely, and don't just shower terms of abuse over yourself.' When the brother heard this, he did penance before Serapion, and went away much helped.

10. Once a provincial judge heard of Moses and went to Scetis to see him. They told Moses that he was on his way, and he got up and fled towards a marsh. The judge and his entourage met him, and asked him, 'Tell me, old man, where is the cell of Moses?' He said, 'What do you want to see him for? He's a fool and a heretic.' The judge came to the church, and said to the clergy, 'I have heard about Moses and I came to see him. But I met an old man on the way to Egypt, and I asked him where the cell of Moses was and he said, "Why are you looking for him? He is a fool and a heretic." ' The clergy were distressed and said, 'What sort of person was your old man who told you this about the holy man?' They said, 'He was an old man, tall and black, wearing the oldest possible clothes.' The clergy said, 'That was Moses. He said that about himself because he didn't want you to see him.' The judge went away very impressed.

11. A brother asked Mathois, 'If I go to live in such-and-such a place, what do you suggest I do there?' He said, 'If you live there, don't try to make a reputation for yourself on some pretext, like saying either "I will not join the other monks" or "I will not eat this and that." This is the sort of thing that creates a bubble of reputation, and afterwards you will suffer from crowds. When people hear that sort of thing they flock there.'

12. When Nesteros the Great was walking in the desert with a brother, they saw a dragon and ran away. The brother said, 'Were you afraid, abba?' Nesteros answered, 'I wasn't afraid, my son. But it was right to run away from the dragon, otherwise I should have had to run away from conceit.'

13. A provincial judge once wanted to see Poemen and he would not allow it. So the judge arrested his nephew as if he were a criminal and imprisoned him, saying, 'I will release him when Poemen comes to ask about him.' The boy's mother came to her brother Poemen and began to weep outside the door of his cell. Bitterly unhappy, she began to reproach him, saying, 'You may have a heart of cold steel, you may be

pitiless, but at least have mercy on your kin and relent.' But he told her, 'Poemen is not a father of children.' So she went away. When the judge heard this he sent a messenger to say, 'You have only to ask and I will release him.' Poemen sent back this message, 'Try his case legally. If he ought to die, let him die. If he is innocent, do as you say.'

14. Poemen also said, 'Teach your heart to follow what your tongue is saying to others.' He also said, 'Men try to appear excellent in preaching but they are less excellent in practising what they preach.'

15. Once Adelphius, who was bishop of Nilopolis, came to see Sisois on the mountain of Antony. When he was about to leave, Sisois made him eat at dawn, although it was a fast day. When they had laid out the food, some brothers knocked at the door. Sisois said to his disciple, 'Give them something to eat, because they are weary.' But Adelphius said to the disciple, 'Send them away for awhile, or they will say, "Sisois was eating at dawn."' Sisois looked at him, and said to the disciple, 'Go and give them food.' When they saw the cooked food they said, 'Have you got visitors? Is even the hermit eating with you?' The disciple said, 'Yes.' Then they were upset, saying, 'God forgive you letting him eat at this hour. Don't you know that he has been fasting rigorously for a great many days?' When the bishop heard this, he began to do penance before Sisois and said, 'I apologize, abba, my thought was human, you did what is of God.' Sisois said to him, 'Unless God glorifies man, man's glory cannot last.'

16. Ammon (of the place called Raithu) brought this question to Sisois: 'When I read Scripture, I am tempted to make elaborate commentaries and prepare myself to answer questions on it.' He replied, 'You don't need to do that. It is better to speak simply, with a good conscience and a pure mind.'

17. Once a provincial magistrate came to see Simon. Simon took off the leather belt that he wore and climbed a palm tree to clean it with the palm leaves. When the judge's party came up, they said, 'Where is the hermit of this desert?' Simon answered, 'There is no hermit here.' So the judge went away.

18. Another time a magistrate came to see him and the clergy who went on ahead said to him, 'Abba, get ready, for the judge has heard of you and is coming to be blessed by you.' So he covered himself with sackcloth and took bread and cheese in his hand, and sat down in his doorway and began to eat it. The magistrate arrived with his retinue. When they saw him they despised him and said, 'Is this the hermit about whom we heard such great things?' They turned round and went straight home.

19. Syncletica said, 'An open treasury is quickly spent; any virtue will be lost if it is published abroad and is known about everywhere. If you

put wax in front of a fire it melts; and if you pour vain praises on the soul it goes soft and weak in seeking goodness.'

20. She also said, 'The same thing cannot at once be seed and a full-grown bush. So men with a worldly reputation cannot bear heavenly fruit.'

21. Once at a feast day in Cellia the brothers were eating their meal in church. But one of them said to the server, 'I eat nothing cooked, only salted.' The serving monk called to another brother in front of the whole crowd, 'This brother doesn't eat what is cooked, bring him the salt.' But one of the brothers stood up and said to him, 'It would have been better for you to eat meat today in your cell than to have heard this said in front of many brothers.'

22. A hermit was fasting and not eating bread, and he went to visit another hermit. By chance some other pilgrims came there and the hermit made them a little vegetable soup. When they sat down to eat, the fasting hermit took a single pea which he dipped in the soup and chewed it. When they got up from the table, the hermit took him to one side and said, 'Brother, if you visit someone, don't make a display there of your way of life. If you want to keep your own rule, stay in your cell and never go out.' The brother accepted the advice, and thenceforth behaved like other people and ate what was put before him.

23. A hermit said, 'If a man prepares for the next day, it cuts away the fruit of his spirit and leaves him dry.'

24. A hermit said, 'When you flee from the company of other people, or when you despise the world and worldlings, take care to do so as if it were you who was being idiotic.'

NON-JUDGEMENT

1. Once a brother in the community of Elias fell when he was tempted. He was expelled from the community, and went to the mountain to Antony. When he had been with him for some time, Antony sent him back to his community, but when they saw him, they sent him away again. So he went back to Antony and said, 'They won't have me, abba.' So Antony sent a message to them saying, 'A ship was wrecked in the ocean and lost its cargo, and with great difficulty the empty ship was brought to land. Do you want to run the ship that has been rescued onto the rocks and sink it?' They realized that Antony had sent him back, and at once accepted him.

2. A brother sinned and the presbyter ordered him to go out of church. But Bessarion got up and went out with him, saying, 'I, too, am a sinner.'

3. When Isaac of the Thebaid visited a community, he saw that one of the brothers was sinful, and passed sentence on him. But when he was returning to his cell in the desert, the angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell, and said, 'I will not let you go in.' He asked, 'Why not?' The angel of the Lord replied, 'God sent me to ask you, "Where do you tell me to send that sinful brother whom you sentenced?"' At once Isaac repented, saying, 'I have sinned, forgive me.' The angel said, 'Get up, God has forgiven you. In future take care to judge no man before God has judged him.'

4. In Scetis a brother was once found guilty. They assembled the brothers, and sent a message to Moses telling him to come. But he would not come. Then the presbyter sent again saying, 'Come, for the gathering of monks is waiting for you.' Moses got up and went. He took with him an old basket, which he filled with sand and carried on his back. They went to meet him and said, 'What does this mean, abba?' He said, 'My sins run out behind me and I do not see them and I have come here today to judge another.' They listened to him and said no more to the brother who had sinned but forgave him.

5. Joseph asked Poemen, 'Tell me how to become a monk.' He said, 'If you want to find rest in this life and the next, say at every moment, "Who am I?" and judge no one.'

6. A brother said to Poemen, 'If I see my brother sin is it really right not to tell anyone about it?' He said, 'When we cover our brother's sin,

God covers our sin. When we tell people about our brother's guilt, God does the same with ours.'

7. Once a brother in a community sinned. In the same region there was a hermit who had not gone out of his cell for a long time. The abbot of the community went to the hermit and told him of the monk's offence. The hermit said, 'Expel him.' So the monk was expelled from the community, and he flung himself into a ditch and wept. Some other monks happened to go by on their way to see Poemen, and they heard the sinful monk groaning in the ditch. They climbed down and found him despairing with grief and they asked him to go with them to the hermit. He would not, saying, 'I shall die here.' The brothers went to Poemen and told him about it. He asked them to go back to the monk and say, 'Poemen wants you.' They did what he said, and the monk came to Poemen. When he saw how he was suffering, he got up and kissed him, and hospitably invited him to eat with him. Meanwhile, Poemen sent one of his brothers to the hermit with this message, 'I have heard of you, and for many years I have wanted to meet you, but we were both too idle to arrange a meeting. But now, by God's will let us take this chance; make the tiring journey so that we can meet.' Poemen had a rule of not going out of his cell. When the hermit heard the message, he said, 'He would not have sent to me unless God had inspired him to do so.' He got up and went. They greeted each other gladly and sat down. Poemen said to him, 'There were two men and they were each mourning for a dead man. But one left the dead man he was mourning for, and went to weep for the other's.' The old hermit was stricken when he heard this, and remembered what he had done. He said: 'Poemen is in heaven, I am only on the earth.'

8. A brother asked Poemen, 'What am I to do, for I become weak just by sitting in my cell?' He said, 'Despise no one, condemn no one, revile no one: and God will give you quietness, and you will sit at peace in your cell.'

9. Once there was a meeting of monks in Scetis, and they discussed the case of a guilty brother but Pior said nothing. Afterwards he got up and went out, took a sack, filled it with sand, and carried it on his shoulders. He put a little sand in a basket and carried it in front of him. The monks asked him, 'What are you doing?' He answered, 'The sack with a lot of sand is my sins; they are many, so I put them on my back and then I shall not weep for them. The basket with a little sand is the sins of our brother and they are in front of me, and I see them and judge them. This is not right. I ought to have my own sins in front of me, and think about them, and ask God to forgive me.' When the monks heard this, they said, 'This is the true way of salvation.'

10. A hermit said, 'Do not judge an adulterer if you are chaste or you

will break the law of God just as much as he does. For he who said “Do not commit adultery” also said “Do not judge.” ’

11. The presbyter of a church used to come to a hermit to consecrate the Eucharist for him so that he could receive it. But someone else visited the hermit and said evil things about that presbyter. The next time the presbyter came to consecrate as usual the hermit was horrified and would not let him in. The presbyter saw it and went away. Then the hermit heard a voice saying, ‘Men have taken my judgement into their own hands.’ He saw a vision of a well of gold and a bucket of gold, and a rope of gold, and plenty of drinking water. He saw a leper emptying and refilling the bucket and he wanted to drink but did not because it was a leper who had poured the water out. Then the voice came a second time to him and said, ‘Why don’t you drink this water? What does it matter who draws it? For he only draws it, and pours it out again.’ Then the hermit came to himself, and understood what the vision had meant. He called the presbyter and made him consecrate the offering as before.

12. Two brothers in a community lived a holy life, and had made such progress that they could see the grace of God in each other. It happened that one of them went out of the monastery on a Friday morning and saw a man eating. He said to him: ‘Why are you eating at this hour on a Friday?’ On Saturday the usual celebration of mass was held. His brother saw that the grace which had been given the other had left him, and he was distressed. He went to his cell and said, ‘What have you done, brother? I do not see the grace of God in you as I used to do.’ He said, ‘I am not aware of having sinned, either in deed or thought.’ His brother said, ‘Did you say an unnecessary word to someone?’ Then he remembered, and said, ‘Yes. Yesterday I saw someone eating food in the morning, and I said to him, “Are you eating at this hour on a Friday?” That is my sin. Do penance with me for a fortnight and we will beg God to forgive me.’ They did so. After a fortnight the brother saw the grace of God again coming upon his brother and they were comforted, and gave thanks to God who alone is good.

1. Antony said, 'Some wear out their bodies by fasting; but because they have no discretion this only puts them further away from God.'
2. Some brothers came to Antony to tell him their dreams and find out whether they were true or whether they were illusions of the demons. They had set out with a donkey which had died on the journey. When they reached Antony, before they told him anything, he said, 'Why did your donkey die on the journey?' They said, 'How did you know that, abba?' He said, 'The demons showed it to me.' They said to him, 'That is just what we have come to consult you about. We too have dreams which have often come true; and we do not want to be misled about this.' Antony had answered them by taking his example from the donkey, showing them that such dreams are caused by demons.

A hunter happened to come by and saw Antony talking in a relaxed way with the brothers, and he was shocked. The hermit wanted to show him how we should sometimes be less austere for the sake of the brothers, and said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow, and draw it.' He did so, and Antony said, 'Draw it further' and he drew it further. He said again, 'Draw it yet further,' and he drew it some more. Then the hunter said to him, 'If I draw it too far, the bow will snap.' Antony answered, 'So it is with God's work. If we always go to excess, the brothers quickly become exhausted. It is sometimes best not to be rigid.' The hunter was ashamed when he heard this, and profited much from it. The brothers were encouraged and went home.

3. A brother said to Antony, 'Pray for me.' He answered, 'Neither I nor God will have mercy on you unless you do something about it yourself and ask God's help.'
4. Antony also said, 'God does not let inner conflicts be stirred up in this generation, because he knows that they are too weak to bear it.'
5. Evagrius once said to Arsenius, 'How is it that we educated and learned men have no goodness, and Egyptian peasants have a great deal?' Arsenius answered, 'We have nothing because we go chasing worldly knowledge. These Egyptian peasants have got their goodness by hard work.'
6. Arsenius of blessed memory said, 'A monk living in a place that is not his native country will never be half-hearted, and so will be at peace.'

7. Mark asked Arsenius, 'It is right, isn't it, to have nothing unnecessary in one's cell? I saw a brother who had a few cabbages, and he was rooting them out.' Arsenius said, 'It is right, but each should do what is right for his own way of life. If he is not strong enough to endure without the cabbages, he will plant them again.'

8. Peter, the disciple of Lot, told this story. 'I was once in the cell of Agatho, when a brother came to him and said, "I want to live with the monks; tell me how to do so." Agatho said, "From the first day you join them, remember you're a pilgrim all the days of your life, and do not be too confident." Macarius said to him, "What does confidence do?" He replied, "It is like a fierce drought. When it is dry, everyone flees away from the land because it destroys even the fruit on the trees." Macarius said, "Is it only false confidence that is like that?" Agatho said, "No passion is worse than confidence; it is the mother of all passion. It is best for the monk's progress that he should not be confident at all, even when he is alone in his cell." '

9. Daniel said, 'When Arsenius was dying, he gave us this instruction: Do not make any offering for me. If I have made any offering for myself during my life, I shall find it.'

10. They said of Agatho that some people went to him because they heard he was a man of great discretion. Wanting to test whether he was irritable, they said to him, 'Are you Agatho? We have heard of you that you are an adulterer and a proud man.' He answered, 'It is true.' They said to him, 'Are you that Agatho who gossips and slanders?' He answered, 'I am.' They asked him, 'Are you Agatho the heretic?' He answered, 'I am no heretic.' So they asked him, 'Why did you patiently bear it when we slandered you, but did not endure it when we said you were a heretic?' He answered, 'I agreed to the first charges against myself for the good of my soul. But I didn't accept it when you said I was a heretic because that is to be separated from God, and I don't want to be separated from God.' They admired his discretion, and went away edified.

11. Agatho was asked, 'Which is more difficult, bodily discipline, or guard over the inner self?' He said, 'Man is like a tree. His bodily discipline is like the leaves of the tree, his guard over the inner self is like the fruit. Scripture says that "every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). So we ought to take every precaution about guarding the mind, because that is our fruit. Yet we need to be covered and beautiful with leaves, which is bodily discipline.' Agatho was wise in understanding, earnest in discipline, armed at all points, careful about keeping up his manual work, sparing in food and clothing.

12. In Scetis there was a meeting to discuss something; and after the

decision was taken, Agatho came in and said, 'You have not made a good decision.' They said to him, 'Who are you to say that?' He answered, 'A son of man, for it is written, "If ye truly speak righteousness, judge ye the thing that is right, O ye sons of men" (Ps. 58:1).'

13. Agatho said, 'If an angry man were to raise the dead, God would still be displeased with his anger.'

14. Three monks came to Achillas, and one of them had a bad reputation. The first monk said, 'Abba, make me a fishing-net.' He said, 'I won't.' The second said to him, 'Will you give us a memento of yourself to keep in our community?' He answered, 'I don't have time.' Then the third, the one who had the bad reputation, said to him, 'Make me a fishing-net, and so I shall have a blessing from your hands, abba.' At once he answered, 'I will do that.' But the first two, whose requests he had refused, said privately to him, 'Why did you refuse our requests and consent to his?' Achillas answered, 'I could tell you that I would not do it because I had no time, and you would not be vexed. But if I did not do it for this monk, he would say, "The hermit has heard my reputation and for that reason has refused to make me a net." So immediately I set to work with the string, to soothe his soul and prevent him being sad.'

15. They said of one hermit that for fifty years he ate no bread and drank very little water. He said, 'I have destroyed lust and greed and vanity.' When Abraham heard that he had said this, he came to him and said, 'Was it you who said this?' He answered, 'Yes.' Abraham said to him, 'Supposing you go into your cell and find a woman on your mat, could you think she was not a woman?' He said, 'No. But I would fight against my thoughts, so as not to touch her.' Abraham said, 'Then you have not killed lust, the passion is still alive; you have only imprisoned it. Suppose you were walking along a road and saw stones on one side and gold in jars on the other, could you think the gold and the stones were of the same value?' He answered, 'No, but I would resist my desire and not let myself pick it up.' Abraham said to him, 'Then the passion still lives, you have only imprisoned it.' He went on, 'If you heard that one brother loved you and spoke well of you, and another brother hated you and slandered you, and they both came to visit you, would they both be equally welcome to you?' He said, 'No: but I would force myself to treat him who hates me just as well as him who loves me.' So Abraham said to him, 'Then your passions are alive, only in some measure holy men have got them chained.'

16. It was said that a hermit was working earnestly in his cell, wrapped up in his mat. He went to visit Ammon, who saw him using his mat like this, and said to him, 'That is not a good idea.' The hermit said, 'Three thoughts trouble me. The first is that I ought to go and

live somewhere else in the desert; the second is that I should go out and find a foreign country where no one knows me; the third is that I should shut myself in my cell, see no one, and eat every other day.’ Ammon said to him, ‘None of these three would be any use to you. Stay in your cell, eat a little every day, always keep in your heart the words of the publican in the Gospel, and you can be saved (Luke 18:13).’

17. Daniel said, ‘If the body is strong, the soul weakens. If the body weakens, the soul is strong.’ He also said, ‘If the body is prosperous, the soul grows lean; if the body is lean, the soul grows prosperous.’

18. Daniel also said that when Arsenius was in Scetis, there was a monk who stole the property of the other monks. Arsenius, wanting to do him good and free the others from being troubled, took him to his cell and said, ‘If you’ll stop stealing, I’ll give you whatever you want.’ He gave him gold, money and trinkets, and everything he found in his bag. But the monk stole again. Arsenius, seeing that he was always troubling the monks, expelled him, and said, ‘If you find a brother committing crimes through bodily infirmity, you must bear with him. But if he does not stop after being warned, expel him. He hurts his own soul, and also disturbs everyone who lives here.’

19. Soon after Evagrius had become a monk, he went to a hermit and said, ‘Abba, speak a word to me by which I may be saved.’ He said, ‘If you would be saved, when you go to visit someone, do not speak until he asks you a question.’ Evagrius was moved by this remark, and did penance before him, and pleased him by saying, ‘Indeed, I have read many books, and never found such learning.’ He went away much encouraged.

20. Evagrius said, ‘A wandering mind is strengthened by reading, and prayer. Passion is dampened down by hunger and work and solitude. Anger is repressed by psalmody and long-suffering and mercy. But all these should be at the proper times and in due measure. If they are used at the wrong times and to excess, they are useful for a short time. But what is only useful for a short time, is harmful in the long run.’

21. Ephriam was passing by when a harlot (she was the devil’s agent) began to make every effort to attract him to sinful intercourse: or, if she failed in this, at least to stir him to anger, for no one had ever seen him angry or brawling. He said to her, ‘Come with me.’ When they came to a crowded place, he said to her, ‘Come on, I will lie with you here as you wanted.’ She looked round at the crowd and said, ‘How can we do it here, with all these people standing round? We should be ashamed.’ He said, ‘If you blush before men, should you not blush the more before God, who discloses the hidden things of darkness?’ So she went away confused and taken aback, without gaining anything.

22. Some brothers once came to Zeno and asked him, 'What is meant by the text in the book of Job, "Heaven is not pure in God's sight" (Job 15:15)?' He answered, 'These brothers have stopped seeing their sins, and are searching the heavenly places. The meaning of that text is that since God alone is pure, it may be said that not even heaven is pure in his sight.'

23. Theodore of Pherme said, 'If a friend of yours is tempted by lust, give him a helping hand if you can and pull him back. But if he falls into heresy, and persists in spite of your efforts, go away quickly, cut off his friendship. For if you stay with him, you may be dragged with him into hell.'

24. Once Theodore came to see John, who had been born a eunuch. While they were talking, Theodore said, 'When I was in Scetis, I devoted myself to the soul's work, and treated the body's work as if it were a side-issue. But now it is the other way round; I treat the soul's work as though it were the side-issue.'

25. Once one of the monks came to Theodore and said, 'Look here, that brother has gone back to the world.' Theodore said to him, 'Don't be surprised at that. Be surprised when you hear that a man has been able to escape the jaws of the enemy.'

26. Theodore said, 'Many choose the repose of this world before God gives them His rest.'

27. They said of John the Short that he once said to his elder brother, 'I want to be free of trouble like the angels, doing no work, and serving God unceasingly.' He stripped himself and went into the desert. After a week there, he went back to his brother. When he knocked on the door, his brother answered without opening it, and said, 'Who's there?' He said, 'It's John.' His brother replied, 'John has become an angel, and is no longer among men.' But he went on knocking and saying, 'It really is John.' His brother did not open the door, but left him outside till morning as a punishment. At last he opened the door and said, 'If you are a man, you need to work in order to live. If you are an angel, why do you want to come into my cell?' So John did penance, and said, 'Forgive me, brother.'

28. Once some monks came to Scetis, and John the Short was with them. During supper, an eminent presbyter got up to give them each a little water to drink. No one accepted it except John the Short. The others were surprised, and said, 'How is it that you, the least of all, dared to accept the ministry of a great old man?' He replied, 'When I get up to hand water round, I'm glad if everyone takes it, because I've been able to do them a service and will have a reward. That's why I took it just now, to let the one who offered it have his reward; perhaps he would have been sad if no one had accepted it.' They all admired

his discretion.

29. Poemen once asked Joseph, 'What am I to do when temptations attack me? Do I resist them, or let them come in?' He said, 'Let them come in and then fight them.' So he went back to his cell in Scetis. By chance, a man from the Thebaid told the brothers in Scetis that he had asked Joseph the same question, 'When temptation comes, do I resist it, or do I let it in?' and that he had said to him, 'On no account let it in, but cut it off at once.' When Poemen heard that Joseph had said this to the man from the Thebaid, he went back to Joseph at Panephysis and said to him, 'Abba, I entrusted my thoughts to your care: and you said one thing to me, and the opposite to a monk from the Thebaid.' Joseph said, 'You know that I love you?' He answered, 'Yes.' He said, 'Didn't you tell me to say what I thought as though I was talking for my own good? If temptations come, and you deal with them within yourself, they will strengthen you. I said this to you as I should say it to myself. But there are other men for whom it is bad that passions should enter, and they must cut them off at once.'

30. Poemen said, 'In Lower Heracleon I once visited Joseph, and he had by his cell a very beautiful mulberry tree. In the morning he said to me, "Go and fetch yourself some mulberries to eat." It was Friday. Now I did not usually eat on Fridays, as it was a fast day, so I asked him, "For the Lord's sake, tell me why you said to me, 'Go and eat.' I didn't go because it was a fast day, but I was ashamed to disobey your command, for I think you had some reason for it." But he replied, "Hermits do not at first speak openly to brothers, but say some very indirect things; if they see that the brothers do these indirect things; then only do they say what is good for them because they know that the brothers will obey them in everything." '

31. A brother asked Joseph, 'What shall I do? I cannot bear to be tempted, nor to work, nor to give alms.' He said to him, 'If you cannot do any of these, at least keep your conscience clear from every sin against your neighbour, and you will be saved, for God looks for the soul that does not sin.'

32. Isaac from the Thebaid said to his brothers, 'Do not bring boys here. Boys were the reason why four monasteries in Scetis were deserted.'

33. Longinus asked Lucius, 'I have three ideas and the first is to go on a pilgrimage.' He answered, 'If you do not control your tongue, you will never be a pilgrim wherever you travel. But control your tongue here, and you will be a pilgrim without travelling.' Longinus said, 'My second idea is to fast for two days at a time.' Lucius answered, 'The prophet Isaiah said, "Even if you bend your neck to the ground, your fast will not so be accepted" (Is. 58:5); you should rather guard your

mind from evil thoughts.' Longinus said, 'My third idea is to avoid the company of men.' Lucius answered, 'Unless you first deal with your sins by living among men you will not be able to deal with yourself when you live alone.'

34. Macarius said, 'If we remember the evil that men have done us, we close our minds to the power of remembering God. But if we remember the evil which the devils cause, we shall be undisturbed.'

35. Mathois said, 'Satan does not know which passion will seduce the soul, and so he scatters his tares in it without direction. At one time he throws in the seeds of lust, at another the seeds of slander, and the rest in the same way. Wherever he sees a soul drawn towards one of the passions, he concentrates on that. If he knew what was most tempting to a soul, he would not scatter such a variety of temptations.'

36. They told this story of Nathyra, who was the disciple of Silvanus. When he was living in his cell on Mount Sinai, he regulated his life with moderation and allowed himself what his body needed. But after he was made bishop in Pharan, he afflicted himself with severe austerities. His disciple said to him, 'Abba, when we were in the desert you did not torment yourself like this.' Nathyra said to him, 'My son, there we had solitude, and quiet and poverty, and so I wanted to discipline my body in such a way that I should not fall sick. For if I had fallen sick, I would have needed assistance which I could not have upon Mount Sinai. But now we are in the world where there are many opportunities of sin and if I fall ill, there are friends who will help me, and prevent me from falling away from a monk's aim.'

37. A brother asked Poemen, 'I am troubled in spirit, and want to leave this place.' He said, 'Why?' He said, 'I have heard an unedifying story about one of the brothers.' Poemen said, 'Is the story true?' He said, 'Yes, abba. The brother who told me is a man to be believed.' He answered, 'The brother who told you is not to be trusted. If he were, he would not have told you that story. When God heard the cry of the men of Sodom, he did not believe it until he had gone down and seen with his own eyes.' The brother said, 'I too have seen it with my own eyes.' When Poemen heard this, he looked down and picked off the ground a wisp of straw and said, 'What is this?' The brother replied, 'Straw.' Then he reached up and touched the roof of the cell, and said, 'What is this?' He answered, 'It is the beam that holds up the roof.' Then Poemen said, 'Keep remembering that your sins are like this beam: and that brother's sins are like this wisp of straw.' When Sisois heard this, he marvelled, and said, 'How shall I bless you, Poemen? Your words are like precious jewels, full of grace and glory.'

38. Some neighbouring priests once came to the monastery of Poemen. Anub went in and said to him, 'Let's invite these priests to

receive the gifts of God here in charity.' But Poemen stood in silence for a long time, and made no reply: and Anub went out sadly. Those who were sitting round said to Poemen, 'Why didn't you answer him?' Poemen said to them, 'I've no reason to do so, for already I am dead. Dead men do not speak. It is not my fault that I am still here in your company.'

39. A brother once went out on a pilgrimage from the monastery of Poemen, and came to see a hermit who lived with love towards all and received many visitors. The brother told the hermit stories about Poemen and when the hermit heard of Poemen's strength of character, he longed to see him. The brother returned to Egypt and after some time the hermit went from his country to Egypt to see the brother who had visited him for he had told him where he lived. When the brother saw the hermit, he was surprised and very glad. The hermit said to him, 'If you love me, take me to Poemen.' So the brother showed him the way there. The brother told Poemen this about the hermit, saying, 'A great and very loving man, especially honoured in his own district, has come here wanting to see you.' So Poemen received him kindly. After they had exchanged greetings, they sat down. The hermit began to talk about Holy Scripture, and about the things spiritual and heavenly. But Poemen turned his face away, and answered nothing. When the hermit saw that he would not speak with him, he was upset and went out: and he said to the brother who had brought him there, 'My journey was in vain. I saw the hermit but he did not deign to speak to me.' The brother went to Poemen, and said, 'Abba, it was to talk with you that this great man came here, a man of much honour in his own land. Why did you not speak to him?' Poemen replied, 'He's from above, and speaks of the things of heaven. I'm from below, and speak of the things of earth. If he'd spoken with me about the soul's passions, I would willingly have answered him. But if he speaks of the things of the spirit, I know nothing about them.' So the brother went out and said to the hermit, 'The reason is that he does not easily discuss Scripture. But if anyone talks to him about the soul's passions, he will answer.' Then the hermit was stricken with penitence, and went to Poemen and said, 'What shall I do, abba? My passions rule me.' He looked at him happily and said, 'Now you are welcome; you have only to ask and I will speak with understanding.' The hermit was greatly strengthened by their talk, and said, 'Truly, this is love's way.' He thanked God that he had been able to see such a holy man, and returned to his own country.

40. A brother came to consult Poemen and said, 'I have committed a great sin, and I will do penance for three years.' But Poemen said to him, 'That is a long time.' The brother said, 'Are you telling me to do penance for one year then?' Again he said, 'That is a long time.' Some

of the people who were nearby suggested, 'A penance of forty days?' Again he said, 'That is a long time.' Then he added, 'I think that if someone is wholeheartedly penitent, and determined not to sin that sin again, God will accept a penance of even three days.'

41. Ammon questioned Poemen on the subject of the impure thoughts within the heart, and on the subject of vain desire. Poemen said, 'Can the axe do harm unless the woodman is using it? Do not reach out your hands to use those things, and they will do you no harm.'

42. Isaiah questioned him about the same subject. Poemen said, 'Cloth, if it is too long in a chest, becomes rotten. If our bodies do not bring those thoughts into the daylight, then they will rot or be destroyed.'

43. Joseph asked him about the same subject. Poemen said, 'If you shut a snake or a scorpion in a box in the end it will die. Wicked thoughts, which the demons scatter, slowly lose their power if the victim has endurance.'

44. Joseph asked Poemen, 'How should we fast?' Poemen said, 'I suggest that everyone should eat a little less than he wants, every day.' Joseph said to him, 'When you were a young man, didn't you fast for two days on end?' He said to him, 'That's right, I used to fast three days on end, even for a week. But the great hermits have tested all these things, and they found that it is good to eat something every day, but on some days a little less. They have shown us that this is the king's highway, for it is easy and light.'

45. Poemen said, 'Do not live in a place where some are jealous of you; you will make no progress there.'

46. A brother came to Poemen, and said to him, 'I have sown seed in my field, and I will make a love-feast with the crop.' He said, 'That's a good idea.' He went away with purpose, and invited more to the love-feast which he was making. When Anub heard this, he said to Poemen, 'Aren't you afraid of God that you said that to the brother?' Poemen said nothing. But two days later he sent for the brother and called him to his cell. He said to him, in the hearing of Anub, 'What did you ask me the other day? My attention was elsewhere.' The brother said, 'I have sown my field, and I am going to make a love-feast with the crop.' Poemen said to him, 'I thought you were talking about your brother, who is a layman. What you are doing is not a monk's work.' The brother was sad when he heard this, and said, 'That's the only kind of work that I know how to do: I can't stop sowing seed in my field.' When he had gone away, Anub began to apologize to Poemen, saying, 'Forgive me.' Poemen said to him, 'Look here, I knew from the beginning that it was not a monk's work. But I spoke to his soul's need, and stilled his soul so that he might increase

in charity; now he has gone away sadly, but he will go on with the same work.'

47. A brother asked Poemen, 'What is the meaning of the text, "Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause" (Matt. 5:22)?' He answered, 'If you are angry with your brother for any kind of trouble that he gives you, that is anger without a cause, and it is better to pluck out your right eye and cast it from you. But if anyone wants to separate you from God, then you must be angry with him.'

48. Poemen said, 'If a man sins and denies it, saying, "I have not sinned," do not correct him, or you will destroy any intention he might have of changing. If you say, "Do not be cast down, my brother, but be careful about that in future," you will move his heart to repent.'

49. The same monk said, 'Experience is good. By experience men are tested.' He also said, 'If a man preaches but does not practise what he preaches, he is like a well of water where everyone can quench their thirst and wash off their dirt, but which cannot clean away the filth and dung that is around it.'

50. He also said, 'He who knows himself is a man.'

51. He also said, 'If a man appears silent in speech but is condemning other people in his heart, he is really talking incessantly. Another man may seem to talk all day, but he is keeping silence since he always speaks in a way that is right with his heart.'

52. He also said, 'Suppose there are three men living together. One lives a good life in stillness, the second is ill but gives thanks to God, the third serves the needs of others with sincerity. These three men are alike, it is as if they were all doing the same work.'

53. He also said, 'Evil cannot drive out evil. If anyone hurts you, do good to him and your good will destroy his evil.'

54. He also said, 'A grumbler is not a monk. Anyone who gives evil for evil is not a monk. An irritable man is not a monk.'

55. A brother came to Poemen and said to him, 'Many thoughts come into my mind and put me in danger.' He sent him out into the open air, and said, 'Open your lungs and do not breathe.' He replied, 'I can't do that.' Then he said to him: 'Just as you can't stop air coming into your lungs, so you can't stop thoughts coming into your mind. Your part is to resist them.'

56. A brother asked him, 'I have been left a fortune, what am I to do with it?' Poemen said to him, 'Go away, and come back in three days, and I will tell you.' The brother came back as he was told, and Poemen said, 'What can I tell you, brother? If I say, "Give it to the church," they will dine off it. If I say, "Give it to your relations," you will have gained no spiritual profit. If I say, "Give it to the poor," you

will be safe. So go and do what you like with it, I can give you no reason for choosing what to do.'

57. Poemen also said, 'If a thought about your bodily needs comes to you, and you put it aside; and then it comes again, and you put it aside, what will happen? If it comes a third time, you will not notice it, and it will do you no harm.'

58. A brother said to Poemen, 'If I see something wrong do you want me to tell you about it?' He said to him, 'It is written, "If a man answers before he has heard, it is foolishness to him and discredit" (Ecclesiasticus 11:8). If you are asked, speak; if not, say nothing.'

59. Poemen related a saying of Ammon, 'One man kept an axe with him all his life but did not know how to cut down a tree; another knew how to use an axe, and could cut down a tree with a few strokes.' He used to say that the axe was discretion.

60. He also said, 'The will of man is a wall of brass, and a stone barrier between himself and God. If he puts it aside, he can say the words of the psalm, "By the help of my God I shall leap over the wall" and, "as for my God, his way is undefiled" (Ps. 18:29-30). If good conduct helps the will, then a man will do good.'

61. A brother asked Poemen, 'I am suffering damage to my soul by being with my abba. What do you advise me to do? Should I continue to stay with him?' Poemen knew that his soul was being harmed by his abba, and he was surprised that he even asked whether he ought to stay with him. He said to him, 'If you want to stay with him, do so.' The brother went away and stayed with his abba. But he came a second time to Poemen, and said, 'My soul is very heavy.' But Poemen did not say to him, 'Leave your abba.' He came a third time, and said, 'Indeed, I can no longer stay with him.' Then Poemen said, 'Now you are saved, go, and stay with him no longer.' He went on, 'If you see your soul being harmed by something there is no need to ask what to do. What we should ask about rather is our secret thoughts, to get them tested by others. But there is no need to ask about obvious sins; they must be cut off at once.'

62. Abraham, who was a disciple of Agatho, once asked Poemen, 'Why do the demons attack me?' Poemen said to him, 'Is it the demons who attack you? It is not the demons who attack me. When we follow our self-will then our wills seem like demons and it is they who urge us to obey them. If you want to know the kind of people with whom the demons fight, it is Moses and those like him.'

63. Poemen said that a brother asked Moses, 'How does someone die to self? Is it through his neighbour?' He answered, 'Unless you think in your heart that you have been shut in a tomb for three years, you cannot attain to self-loss.'

64. A brother questioned Poemen and said, 'How should a monk live in his cell?' He said, 'To stay in the cell is this: externally, to work with the hands, eat once a day, keep silence and meditate and, internally, to make progress by remembering your sins wherever you may be, and keeping the hours of prayer, and keeping a watch on the secret thoughts of the heart. If it is time to stop working with the hands, begin to pray and finish your work later in tranquillity. The aim of all this is to be with those who are good and to avoid the company of the wicked.'

65. Two brothers once came to Pambo. One of them asked him, 'Abba, I fast for two days, and then eat two large buns. Do you think I am saving my soul, or losing it?' The other said, 'With my hands I make two vegetable stews every day, and I keep a little for food, and give the rest away in alms; do you think I shall be saved or lost?' They pressed him for an answer but he did not reply. After some days they were on the point of going away. The clergy said to them, 'Don't be distressed, God will reward you. This is always the way of the abba, he doesn't talk readily, unless God gives him something to say.' So they went to Pambo and said, 'Abba, pray for us.' He said to them, 'Are you going away?' They said, 'Yes.' He gazed at them; and imagining himself in their place, he wrote upon the ground and said, 'Pambo fasts for two days and then eats two large buns; do you think that makes him a monk? No, it does not.' Then he said, 'Pambo makes two vegetable stews every day and gives them away to the poor: do you think this makes him a monk? Not at all.' He was silent for a little, and then said, 'These works are good. But if you act rightly towards your neighbour, that is the way to be saved.' So the brothers were encouraged, and went away joyfully.

66. A brother asked Pambo, 'Why does the enemy prevent me doing good to my neighbour?' He said, 'Do not talk like that, or you will make God a liar. Say, "It is I myself do not want to be kind to others." For God came down to us and said, "I have given you the power of treading upon scorpions and snakes" (Luke 10:19), and so you are beyond the power of the enemy. Why then do you not tread down these evil spirits?'

67. Palladius said, 'The soul which is being trained according to the will of Christ should either be earnest in learning what it does not know, or should publicly teach what it does know. If it wants to do neither, though it could, it is mad. The first step on the road away from God is contempt for teaching, that is, not to want to give food to the soul that truly wants it.'

68. A brother said to Sisois, 'Why do my passions not leave me?' He said to him, 'Because the vessels that fill those passions are within you. Empty them and the passions they cause will go away.'

69. A brother went to visit Silvanus on Mount Sinai. When he saw the brothers hard at work, he said to the old man, ‘ “Labour not for the meat which perisheth” (John 6:27) and “Mary hath chosen the best part” (Luke 10:42).’ Silvanus said to his disciple Zacharias, ‘Put this brother in a cell where there is nothing.’ When three o’clock came, the visitor kept looking at the door, to see when they would send someone to invite him to eat but no one did so. So he got up and went to Silvanus and said, ‘Abba, don’t the brethren eat today?’ He said, ‘Yes, they have eaten already.’ The brother said, ‘Why didn’t you call me?’ He replied, ‘You are so spiritual you do not need food. We are earthly, and since we want to eat, we work with our hands. But you have chosen the good part, reading all day, and not wanting to take earthly food.’ When the brother heard this he prostrated himself in penitence and said, ‘Forgive me, abba.’ Silvanus said, ‘I think Mary always needs Martha, and by Martha’s help Mary is praised.’

70. Syncletica said, ‘Merchants toil in search of riches and are in danger of their lives from shipwreck; the more wealth they win, the more they want; and they think what they have already is of no worth but bend their whole mind to what they have not yet got. But we have nothing, not even that which we ought to seek; we do not even want to possess what we need, because we fear God.’

71. She also said, ‘There is a useful sorrow, and a destructive sorrow. Sorrow is useful when we weep for our sins, and for our neighbour’s ignorance, and so that we may not relax our purpose to attain to true goodness, these are the real kinds of sorrow. Our enemy adds something to this. For he sends sorrow without reason, which is something called lethargy. We ought always to drive out a sadness like that with prayers and psalms.’

72. She also said, ‘It is good not to be angry. If it happens, do not give way to it for as much as one day.’

73. She said, ‘ “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). Likewise, if you wait until the sun is going down on your life, you will not know how to say, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34). Why do you hate the man who has harmed you? It is not he who has harmed you but the devil. You ought to hate the sickness, not the sick man.’

74. She also said, ‘It is dangerous for a man to try teaching before he is trained in the good life. A man whose house is about to fall down may invite travellers inside to refresh them, but instead they will be hurt in the collapse of the house. It is the same with teachers who have not carefully trained themselves in the good life; they destroy their hearers as well as themselves. Their mouth invites to salvation, their way of life leads to ruin.’

75. She also said, 'The devil sometimes sends a severe fast which is too prolonged; the devil's disciples do this as well as holy men. How do we distinguish the fasting of our God and King from the fasting of that tyrant the devil? Clearly by its moderation. Throughout your life, then, you ought to keep an unvarying rule of fasting. Do you fast four or five days on end and then lose your spiritual strength by eating a feast? That really pleases the devil! Everything which is extreme is destructive. So do not suddenly throw away your armour, or you may be found unarmed in the battle and easily captured. Our body is the armour, our soul is the warrior. Take care of both, and you will be ready for whatever comes.'

76. Two monks came from Pelusium to see Sarah. On the way they said to each other, 'Let us humiliate this amma.' So they said to her, 'Take care that your soul be not puffed up, and that you do not say, "Look, some hermits have come to consult me, a woman!"' Sarah said to them, 'I am a woman in sex, but not in spirit.'

77. Sarah also said, 'If I asked God that everyone should see good in me, I should be doing penance at the door of each one. I pray rather that my heart should be pure in all things.'

78. Hyperichius said, 'He who teaches others by his life and not his speech is truly wise.'

79. There once came from the city of Rome a monk who had held a high place in the palace. He lived near the church in Scetis, and had with him a servant to take care of him. The priest of the church saw that he was weak and knew that he was used to comfort: and so he passed on to him whatever the Lord gave to him or to the church. After he had lived in Scetis for twenty-five years, he became well known as a man of prayer who had the spirit of prophecy. One of the great Egyptian monks heard of his reputation and came to see him in the hope that he would find there a more austere way of life. He came into his cell and greeted him; after they had prayed they sat down. But the Egyptian saw he had soft clothing, and a bed of reeds, and a blanket under him, and a little pillow under his head, and clean feet with sandals, and he was inwardly contemptuous. In Scetis they never used to live like this, but practised sterner austerity. But the old Roman, with his gift of prayer and insight, saw that the Egyptian monk was shocked to the core. So he said to his servant: 'Make us a good meal today, for this abba who has come.' He cooked the few vegetables that he had, and they ate at the proper hour: he had a little wine because of his weakness, and they drank that. In the evening they said twelve psalms, and went to sleep afterwards; they did the same in the night. In the morning the Egyptian got up and left, and saying, 'Pray for me,' he went away, not at all impressed. When he had gone a little way the old Roman wanted to heal his mind, and

sent after him and called him back. He said: 'What is your province?' He answered, 'I am an Egyptian.' He said, 'Of what city?' He answered, 'Of no city, I never lived in a city.' He said, 'Before you were a monk, how did you earn your living?' He answered, 'I was a herdsman.' He said to him, 'Where did you sleep?' He answered, 'In the fields.' He said, 'Had you a mattress?' He answered, 'Why should I have a mattress for sleeping in a field?' He said, 'So how did you sleep?' He replied, 'On the ground.' He said, 'What did you eat when you were in the fields? What wine did you drink?' He answered, 'What kind of food and drink do you find in a field?' He said, 'How then did you live?' He answered, 'I ate dry bread, and salt fish if there was any, and I drank water.' Then the Roman said, 'A hard life,' and he added, 'Was there a bath on the farm where you worked?' The Egyptian said, 'No: I washed in the river, when I wanted to.' When the hermit had extracted these answers, and knew how the Egyptian lived and worked before he became a monk, he wanted to help him: and so he described his own past life in the world. 'This wretch in front of you came from the great city of Rome, where I had an important post at the palace in the Emperor's service.' When the Egyptian heard this first sentence, he was moved, and began to listen attentively. He went on, 'So I left Rome, and came into this desert. I, whom you see, had great houses and wealth and I scorned them, and came to this little cell. I, whom you see, had beds decked with gold, with costly coverings: and instead of them God gave me this bed of reeds and this blanket. My clothes were rich and expensive: and instead of them I wear these tatters.' He went on, 'I used to spend much money on my dinner table and instead of it He has given me these few vegetables and this little cup of wine. Many servants used to wait upon me, and instead the Lord has given one man alone to look after me. Instead of a bath I dip my feet in a little bowl of water, and I use sandals because of my infirmity. For the pipe and the lyre and all the varieties of music which used to delight me at dinner I say twelve psalms in the day, and twelve psalms in the night. For the sins which once I committed, I now offer this poor and useless service to God in quietness. See then, abba, do not be scornful of my weakness.' When the Egyptian had listened to him, he came to his senses and said, 'I am a fool. I came from a hard life of labour to be at rest in the monk's way of life and now I have what I didn't have before. But you have come of your own accord to this hard life, and have left the comforts of the world; you came from honour and wealth to loneliness and poverty.' So he went away with much profit; and he became his friend, and used to go to the old man for his soul's good, for Arsenius (this was his name) was a man of discernment, and full of the fragrance of the Holy Spirit.

80. A hermit said, 'All chatter is unnecessary. Nowadays everyone

talks but what is needed is action. That is what God wants, not useless talking.'

81. A brother asked some of the monks whether evil thoughts defiled a man. When they were asked this question, some said, 'Yes,' but some said, 'No, for if that were so, we ordinary people could not be saved. If we think of vile actions but do not do them, it is this which brings salvation.' The questioner was discontented with the monks' diverse answers, and he went to an experienced hermit and asked him about it. He replied, 'Everyone is required to act according to his capacity.' Then the brother asked him, 'For the Lord's sake, explain this saying to me.' So he said, 'Look here, suppose there was a valuable jug and two monks came in, one of whom had a great capacity for a disciplined life, and the other a small capacity. Suppose that the mind of the more disciplined man is moved at the sight of the jug and he says inwardly, "I'd like to have that jug," but the idea leaves him at once, and he puts away any thought of it, then he would not be defiled. But if the less disciplined man covets the jug and is strongly moved by an impulse to take it, and yet after a struggle he does not take it, he would not be defiled either.'

82. A hermit said, 'If someone lives in a place but does not harvest the crops there, the place will drive that person out for not having done the work of that place.'

83. A hermit said, 'If you do anything according to self-will, and not according to God's will, you can afterwards return to the Lord's way, if you did it in ignorance. But whoever obeys self-will and not God's, and refuses to listen to warnings, but claims to know best, he will scarcely be able to come back to the Lord's way.'

84. A hermit was asked, 'What is meant by the text "Narrow and strait is the way" (Matt. 7:14)?' He answered, 'Narrow and strait is the way by which a man does violence to his thoughts and for God's sake breaks down his self-will. This is what was written about the apostles, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee" (Matt. 19:27).'

85. A hermit said, 'As the order of monks is more honourable than that of men of the world, so the travelling monk ought to be in every way a mirror for the monks of the places where he stays.'

86. One of the monks said, 'If a labourer remains where there are no other labourers, he can make no progress. The true labourer struggles that the work may not deteriorate. If an idle man works with a labourer the idle man becomes less idle; and if he does not make progress, at least he does not get idler by seeing someone else working.'

87. A hermit said, 'If a man has words but no works, he is like a tree with leaves but no fruit. Just as a tree laden with fruit is also leafy, the

man of good works will also have good words.'

88. A hermit said that a man once committed a serious sin. Stricken with remorse, he went to confess to another monk. He did not tell him what he had done, but put it in the form of a question, 'If such a thought arose in someone's mind, would he be saved?' The monk, who had no discretion, answered, 'You are completely lost.' When the brother heard this, he said, 'Well, if I'm going to perish, I'll go and do it in the world.' But on his way he considered the matter and decided to tell his temptations to Silvanus, who possessed great discretion in these matters. The brother went to him and did not tell him what he had done, but again put it in the form of a question, 'If a thought like this came into someone's mind, could he be saved?' Silvanus began to speak to him with texts from Scripture, and said, 'That judgement does not only fall on people tempted to sin.' The brother perceived the force of the saying, and began to hope, and told him what he had done. When Silvanus learnt what he had done, he acted like a skilled physician and put on his soul a poultice made of texts from Scripture, showing him that repentance is available for all who in truth and in charity turn to God. After some years Silvanus met the monk who had driven the brother to despair, and told him what had happened, and said, 'That brother, who despaired because of your words, and was going back to the world, is now a bright star among the brothers.' He told him this so that we may know how perilous it is when anyone confesses thoughts or sins to someone without discretion.

89. A hermit said, 'We are not condemned if bad thoughts enter our minds, but only if we use them badly. Because of our thoughts we may suffer shipwreck, but because of our thoughts we may also earn a crown.'

90. A hermit said, 'Do not give to or receive anything from worldly people. Take no notice of women. Do not remain long in the company of a boy.'

91. A brother asked a hermit, 'What shall I do, for I am troubled by many temptations, and I do not know how to resist them?' He said, 'Do not fight against them all at once, but against one of them. All the temptations of monks have a single source. You must consider what kind of root of temptation you have, and fight against that and in this way all the other temptations will also be defeated.'

92. A hermit said this about evil thoughts, 'I beg you, my brothers, control your thoughts as you control your sins.'

93. A hermit said, 'Anyone who wants to live in the desert ought to be a teacher and not a learner. If he still needs teaching, he will come to harm.'

94. A hermit was asked by a brother, 'How do I find God? With fasts,

or labour, or vigils, or works of mercy?’ He replied, ‘You will find Him in all those, and also in discretion. I tell you many have been very stern with their bodies, but have gained nothing by it because they did it without discretion. Even if our mouths stink from fasting, and we have learnt all the Scriptures, and memorized the whole Psalter, we may still lack what God wants, humility and love.’

95. A brother asked a hermit, ‘Abba, look here, I ask my elders questions, and they talk to me for the good of my soul, and I remember nothing they say. Is it any use asking questions when I gain nothing by it? I am deeply sinful.’ There were two empty vessels nearby. The hermit said, ‘Take one of those vessels and put oil in it, rinse it, pour out the oil, and bring the vessel back.’ He did so. He said, ‘Do it again.’ He did so. After he had done it several times, the hermit said, ‘Now, take both vessels and see which is the cleaner.’ He answered, ‘The one into which I put oil.’ The hermit said, ‘It’s the same for the one who asks questions. Although you remember nothing that you have heard, your soul will be cleaner than that of someone who never even asks questions.’

96. A brother was sitting quietly in his cell, and demons who wanted to seduce him came disguised as angels. They stirred him up to go out to the community in church, and they showed him a light. But he went to a hermit and said, ‘Abba, angels come to me with light, and urge me to go to the community.’ The hermit said to him, ‘Do not listen to them, my son: they are demons. When they come to urge you to go out, say, ‘I will go when I want to, I am not listening to you.’ He accepted the advice and went back to his cell. On the next night the demons came again as usual to tempt him. He answered as he had been told, saying, ‘I will go when I want to, I am not listening to you.’ They said to him, ‘It’s that wicked hermit who has deceived you. A brother came to him to borrow money; and, although he had some, he lied and said that he had none, and would give him nothing; that shows you he is a deceiver.’ At dawn the brother got up and came to the hermit and told him what had happened. He said to him, ‘It is true. I had some money, and I didn’t give it to the brother who wanted to borrow it. I knew that if I gave it to him, I should be harming his soul. I thought it better to transgress one commandment than ten. If he had received money from me, we should have had trouble on his account. So don’t listen to the demons who want to seduce you.’ So the brother went back to his cell, much comforted by the words of the hermit.

97. Three brothers once came to a hermit in Scetis. One of them said to him, ‘Abba, I have memorized the Old and New Testaments.’ But the hermit answered, ‘And you have filled the air with words.’ The second said to him, ‘I have written out the Old and New Testaments

with my own hand.' But the hermit said, 'And you have filled the window-ledge with manuscripts.' The third said, 'The grass is growing up my chimney.' But the hermit answered, 'And you have driven away hospitality.'

98. They told this story of a great hermit. If anyone came to ask advice from him, he used to say with great confidence, 'Look, I am acting in the place of God and sitting in his judgement seat; what do you want me to do for you? If you say to me, "Have mercy upon me," God says to you, "If you want me to have mercy on you, you must have mercy on your brothers and then I will have mercy on you. If you want me to forgive you, you must forgive your neighbour." Then is God the cause of your guilt? God forbid. It is in our control, whether we do or do not want to be saved.'

99. They said of a hermit in Cellia that he was a great spiritual worker. While he was at work, a devout man happened to come to his cell; and when he was outside the door, he heard the hermit fighting with his thoughts, and saying, 'Am I to lose everything because of a single word?' The man outside thought that he was quarrelling with someone, and knocked on the door to go in and make peace between them. But when he went in and saw no one else there, he trusted the hermit, and said, 'With whom were you quarrelling, abba?' He replied, 'With my thoughts. I have memorized fourteen books of Scripture; and when I was out of my cell I heard one little word. When I came to say the divine office, I had forgotten all fourteen books and could remember only the one word which I heard outside. That is why I am quarrelling with my thoughts.'

100. Some brothers from a monastery came into the desert to see a hermit: and he received them gladly. As is the custom of hermits, when he saw that they were tired with their journey he made a meal for them, though it was not the proper time for eating, and he refreshed them with what he had in his cell. In the evening they said twelve psalms, and twelve more in the night. While the hermit was keeping watch, he heard them saying, 'Hermits have more rest in the desert than monks do in the monastery.' In the morning they went on to visit a neighbouring hermit. So he said to them, 'Greet him for me, and tell him, "Do not water the vegetables."' The neighbouring hermit understood the message, and kept them working until evening without any food. In the evening he prolonged the service to great length, and then said, 'Let us rest a little for your sakes. You are tired after what is for you such hard work.' He said, 'We don't usually eat today, but let's eat a little for your sake.' Then he brought them dry bread and salt and he said, 'Look, we have a feast today because you have come,' and he added a little sour wine to the mixture. They all got up, and sang psalms until dawn. He said, 'Because you travellers

are here, you must rest a little, and that prevents us keeping the rule.' At daybreak, they wanted to hurry away, but he asked them to stay, and said, 'Spend some more time with me: or at least, for the commandment's sake, keep the hermit's way of life with me for three days.' But when they saw that he was not letting them rest, they stole away secretly.

101. A brother asked one of the hermits, 'If I happen to over-sleep, and am late for the hour of prayer, I am ashamed that others will hear me praying so late, and so I become reluctant to keep the rule of prayer.' He said, 'If ever you oversleep in the morning, get up when you wake, shut the door and the windows, and say your psalms. For it is written, "The day is thine and the night is thine" (Ps. 74:16). God is glorified whatever time it is.'

102. A hermit said, 'One man eats a lot and is still hungry. Another eats a little and has had enough. The man who eats a lot and is still hungry has more merit than the man who eats the little that satisfies him.'

103. A hermit said, 'If some distracting dispute arises between you and another, and the other denies it and says, "I said no such thing," do not argue with him or say, "You did say it." For he will be exasperated, and will say, "Very well, and I meant it." '

104. A brother asked a hermit, 'My sister is poor. If I give her alms, am I giving alms to the poor?' He said, 'No.' The brother said, 'Why is that, abba?' He replied, 'Because your relationship draws you to prefer her.'

105. A hermit said, 'A monk ought not to listen to disparagement; he ought not to be disparaging, and he ought not to be scornful.'

106. A hermit said, 'Do not be pleased at everything that is said, and do not agree with everything that is said. Be slow to believe, and quick to say what is true.'

107. A hermit said, 'Sometimes a brother thinks of something when he is sitting in his cell, and meditating in his heart about it, he cannot understand its meaning and is not given true understanding by God. Then the demons come to his help, and they show him whatever meaning suits them.'

108. One of the hermits said, 'When first we used to meet each other in the assembly and talk of what was helpful to our souls, we were always withdrawn more from the things of sense and we ascended to the heavenly places. But now when we meet we spend our time in gossip, and so we drag each other down.'

109. Another of the hermits said, 'If our inner self behaves soberly, it can control the outer self: but if the inner self does not do this, what other means is there of controlling the tongue?'

110. He also said, 'Because we have come to live in the desert we need to work hard praising God. If we are not going to undertake hard bodily labour, we must labour all the more in praising God.'

111. Another hermit said, 'A man ought always to be working at something in his cell. If he is busy with the psalms, the devil comes to him day after day but finds no resting-place there; even if he succeeds in conquering him and taking him prisoner, God's spirit often comes to him again. But if we are sinners and do not let God's spirit come to us, he will leave us alone.'

112. Some Egyptian monks once went down to Scetis to see the hermits there. They saw them when they were famished after a long fast and therefore were gulping their food: and they were shocked. But the priest saw it and wanted to heal their minds and send them away edified. He spoke to them in the church, saying, 'My brothers, fast longer.' The Egyptian visitors wanted to leave, but he kept them. When they had fasted one day and then a second, they felt very weak for he had made them fast for two days without a break, though in Scetis the monks fast for a week. On Saturday the Egyptians sat down to eat with the brothers. They reached voraciously for their food. One of the monks held back their hands, and said, 'Eat like monks in a disciplined way.' One of the Egyptians threw off the restraining hand, and said, 'Let go of me. I'm dying, I've not eaten cooked food all week.' The priest said to him, 'If you are so weak after a fast of only two days, why were you shocked at brothers who always fast for a week at a time?' They did penance before them, and went away gladly, edified by their abstinence.

113. A brother who renounced the world and took the monk's habit, immediately shut himself up in a hermitage saying, 'I am a solitary.' When the neighbouring hermits heard of it, they came and threw him out of his cell, and made him go round the cells of the brothers and do penance before them saying, 'Forgive me. I am not a solitary, I have only just begun to be a monk.'

114. Some hermits used to say, 'If you see a young man climbing up to heaven by his own will, catch him by the foot and pull him down to earth for it is not good for him.'

115. A brother said to a great hermit, 'Abba, I want to find a monk who agrees with me and I'll live and die with him.' He said, 'Your search is good, my lord.' The brother repeated what he wanted, not understanding the irony of the hermit. But when the hermit saw that he really thought this was a good idea, he said to him, 'If you find a monk after your own heart, do you plan to live with him?' The brother said, 'Yes, of course I want this, if I can find one who agrees with me.' Then the hermit said to him, 'You do not want to follow the

will of anyone, you want to follow your own will, and that is why you will be at peace with him.' Then the brother saw the sense of what he said, and prostrated himself in penitence, saying, 'Forgive me. I was very proud of myself, I thought I was saying something good, when in fact there was nothing good about it at all.'

116. Two earthly minded brothers renounced the world. The younger was the first to begin the life of repentance. One of the hermits came to stay with them, and they brought a basin of water for him to wash. It was the younger who came to wash the feet of the visitor. But the hermit took his hand and motioned him away, and made the elder do it (it is the custom in a monastery to do this in order of seniority). But some brothers standing near said, 'Abba, the elder brother is the younger in religion.' The hermit answered, 'I take away the first place from the younger, and give it to him who is older in years.'

117. A hermit said, 'The prophets wrote books. Our predecessors came after them, and worked hard at them, and then their successors memorized them. But this generation copies them onto papyrus and parchment and leaves them unused on the window-ledge.'

118. A hermit said, 'The cowl we use is the symbol of innocence, the scapular which covers neck and shoulders is the symbol of a cross, the girdle, the symbol of courage. Let us live our lives in the virtues symbolized by our habit. If we do everything sincerely, we shall not fail.'

1. A brother asked Arsenius to give him advice. He said to him, 'As far as possible, try hard to make your inner progress as God would have it, and by this overcome the passions of the body.' He also said, 'If we seek God, he will appear to us; if we grasp Him, He will stay with us.'

2. Agatho said, 'A monk ought not to let his conscience accuse him of anything.' When Agatho was on his death-bed, he lay for three days with his eyes open, without moving. The brothers nudged him, saying, 'Abba, where are you?' He said, 'I am standing before the judgement of God.' They said to him, 'Are you afraid?' He said, 'I worked as hard as I could to keep the commandments of God but I am only human, and I do not know if my works will be pleasing in God's sight.' The brothers said to him, 'Don't you trust in your works? They were in accordance with God's will.' He said, 'I can't rely on that when I come before God, for the judgement of God is not the judgement of men.' When they still tried to make him talk, he said to them, 'Please don't talk to me, I'm busy.' At these words, he breathed forth his soul with joy. They saw him welcoming death as one greets a dear friend. In every thing Agatho was vigilant, and he used to say, 'No one can achieve any of the virtues without taking care.'

3. They said of Ammoi that when he went to church, he did not let his disciple walk beside him, but made him follow a long way behind. If the disciple came near to ask him something, he gave him a brief answer and sent him back at once, saying, 'I'm afraid that while we are talking for the soul's good, some irrelevant words will be spoken; that is why I don't let you walk by my side.'

4. At first Ammoi said to Aesius, 'What do you think of me?' He said, 'You are like an angel, abba.' Later on he said, 'Now what do you think of me?' He replied, 'You are like Satan, for even if you speak a good word, it is like a sword to me.'

5. Alloys said, 'Until you can say in your heart, "Only I and God are in the world," you will not be at peace.'

6. He also said, 'If you really want to, by the evening of one day you can reach a measure of godliness.'

7. When he was dying, Bessarion said, 'A monk ought to be like the Cherubim and Seraphim, all eye.'

8. Daniel and Ammoi once went on a journey together. Ammoi said,

‘Do you think we might rest for a while in a cell, abba?’ Daniel said to him, ‘Who can separate us from God? God is in the cell, he is also outside in the world.’

9. Evagrius said, ‘It is a great thing to pray without distraction. It is even greater to sing psalms without distraction.’

10. He also said, ‘If you always keep in mind your death and the eternal judgement, there will be no stain on your soul.’

11. Theodore of the ninth region of Alexandria said, ‘If God calls us to account for carelessness in our times of prayer, and the way our minds are caught by other things during psalmody, we cannot be saved.’

12. Theonas said, ‘Our mind is hindered and held back from contemplating God, because we are kept prisoner by our bodily passions.’

13. Some of the brothers once came to test John the Short, to see if it was true that he never let his mind wander among earthly thoughts, and never spoke about worldly matters. They said to him, ‘Thanks be to God, it has rained hard this year, and the palm trees have had enough water to begin to grow; the brothers who are the harvesters will find fruit from their hard work.’ John said to them, ‘So it is when the Holy Spirit comes down into the hearts of good men. They grow green and fresh, and in the fear of God put forth leaves.’

14. They said of this John that he once made enough rope for two baskets, and twisted it all into one basket, but he did not see what he was doing until he tried to hang it up, for his mind was occupied in the contemplation of God.

15. There was a hermit in Scetis who lived in a satisfactory way, but he was not good at remembering what he heard. So he went to John the Short to ask him about his forgetfulness. He listened to John, went back to his cell and forgot what he had been told. He came a second time and asked him the same question, listened, went back, and forgot what he had heard the moment he reached his cell. Many times he went backwards and forwards, but could never remember. He happened to meet John and said, ‘Do you know, abba, I’ve forgotten all you told me? I didn’t want to disturb you, so I didn’t come again.’ John said to him, ‘Go and light a lamp,’ and he lit it. John said, ‘Bring more lamps and light them from the first,’ and he did so. John said to him, ‘Was the first lamp harmed, because you used it to light others?’ He said, ‘No.’ ‘In the same way,’ he replied, ‘John would not be harmed. If all the monks of Scetis should come to me, it would not keep me from God’s love. So come to me whenever you want, and don’t hesitate.’ So, by patience on both sides, God cured the forgetfulness of the hermit. This was the work of the hermits of Scetis, to strengthen those who were attacked by passion; their experience in

conflict with themselves meant that they were able to help others along the way.

16. A brother asked John, 'What shall I do? A brother keeps coming and taking me away to help with the work which he is doing: but I am poor and ill, and too weak to do it. How can I obey God's commandment?' He answered him, 'Caleb the son of Jephunneh said to Joshua the son of Nun, "I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me with you to that country and now I am eighty-five. Then I was strong: and I am still just as capable of beginning and ending a battle" (cf. Josh. 14:6, 10–11). So go with him and see if you finish the work as well as you begin it. If you can't, sit in your cell and lament your sins. If they find you weeping when they come, they will not force you to go with them.'

17. Isidore, the priest in Scetis, said, 'When I was young and stayed in my cell, I set no limit to the number of psalms which I said in the service of God. Night and day alike were spent in psalmody.'

18. Cassian told a story of a hermit who was living in the desert. He asked God to grant that he should never fall asleep when the conversation was edifying but that if anyone spoke with back-biting or hate, he should nod off at once so that he would not hear poisonous words. He said that the devil strives hard to make men speak idle words, and fights against letting anyone hear any spiritual teaching. He gave the following example of this: Once when I was talking to some brothers for the good of their souls they became so drowsy that they could not even keep their eyelids open. I wanted to show them that this was the devil's work, so I started gossiping: and at once they sat up and began to enjoy what I was saying. But I said sadly, 'We were talking of heaven just now, and your eyes were closing in slumber: but the moment the talk became frivolous, you all began to listen eagerly. I beg you then, dear brothers, since you know that this is the work of the devil, be watchful and beware of falling asleep when you are hearing about spiritual things.'

19. When Poemen was a young man, he once went to a hermit to ask him three questions. When he arrived at the hermit's cell he forgot one of his three questions, and went back home. He was just reaching out his hand for the key of his cell when he remembered the question which he had forgotten. He left the key lying there, and went back to the hermit. The hermit said to him, 'You have travelled fast to get here, brother.' Poemen explained, 'When I was stretching out my hand for the key, I remembered the question; so I did not open my cell door, but immediately returned to you.' The distance between the cells was very great. The hermit said to him, 'You live up to your name of "Poemen", which means shepherd of sheep; your name shall be famous throughout Egypt.'

20. Ammon came to Poemen, and said to him, 'If I go to my neighbour's cell, or if he comes to mine, we are both afraid of telling each other silly tales which may harm our monastic purpose.' The hermit said to him, 'You are right. Young men need to be on their guard.' Ammon asked him, 'What about old men?' Poemen said to him, 'Old men who make progress and are stable, do not find frivolous words in their mouths and so they do not say them.' Ammon said, 'If I need to talk with my neighbour, do you think I should talk to him about the Scriptures, or about the sayings and admonitions of our predecessors?' Poemen said to him, 'If you can't keep silence, it is much better to talk about the sayings of the elders than about the Scriptures. For the danger is great.'

21. Poemen was asked about nocturnal pollutions. He replied, 'If we strengthen our inner life in the fear of God and work hard at it, we shall find we do not pollute ourselves.'

22. They used to say about Poemen that when he was ready to go out to the meeting for prayer, he first sat by himself for an hour in self-examination, and then went.

23. Poemen said that someone asked Paesius this question, 'What am I to do about my soul? I have become incapable of feeling and I do not fear God.' He said to him, 'Go, and live with someone who does fear God: and by being there, you too will learn to fear God.'

24. He also said, 'The beginning and the end is the fear of the Lord. For it is written, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10) and, when Abraham built an altar the Lord said to him, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12).'

25. He also said, 'Do not stay with anyone who is always scornful when they speak.'

26. He also said, 'I once said to Peter, the disciple of Lot, "When I am in my cell, my soul is at peace. But if a brother comes and tells me what is being said outside, my soul is troubled." Peter told me that Lot used to say, "Your key has opened my door." I said, "What does that mean?" He said: "If someone comes to visit you and you ask him, How are you? Where do you come from? How are such-and-such brothers doing, did they receive you or not, then you are opening the door for your brother to talk, and you hear words that you do not want to hear." I said to him, "That is true. But what else can I do, when a brother visits me?" Peter said, "True wisdom is always sorrowful. When sorrow is not there, you cannot keep a watch on the mind." I said to him, "When I am in my cell, sorrow is with me. But when anyone visits me, or when I go out of my cell, I am sorrowful no longer." He replied, "You are not yet stable in sorrow, you use it as a transitory and expedient feeling." I said, "What do you mean?" He

said to me, "If a man works for something as hard as he can, he finds it ready to hand whenever he needs it for his spiritual profit." ' '

27. A brother said to Sisois, 'I want to guard my heart.' He said to him, 'How can we guard the heart if our tongue leaves the door of the fortress open?'

28. Silvanus was once living on Mount Sinai. His disciple, who was about to go out on some necessary task, said to him, 'Go and get some water, and water the garden.' Silvanus went to draw the water and he covered his face with his cowl, so that he could see only his feet. By chance a visitor arrived to see him at that moment: and looking at him from a distance, was amazed at the sight. He went up to him and said, 'Tell me, abba, why do you cover your face with your hood when you are watering the garden?' He answered, 'So that my eyes should not see the trees, lest my mind should be distracted by the sight.'

29. Moses asked Silvanus, 'Can a monk live every day as though it were the first day of his monastic life?' Silvanus answered, 'If you are truly committed to your way of life, you can live every day, every hour, as though it were the first day or hour of your monastic life.'

30. Some brothers once asked Silvanus, 'What way of life did you follow to be endowed with such prudence?' He answered, 'I have never let any bitter thought remain in my heart.'

31. Serapion said, 'While they are on duty the imperial guards in the emperor's presence must keep their eyes to the front and not turn their heads to one side or the other. So the monk in God's presence must keep his attention all the time on the fear of God and so none of the enemy's attacks can terrify him.'

32. Syncletica said, 'Let us live soberly, for thieves get in through our bodily senses. The inside of the house is sure to be blackened if the smoke that is coiling up outside finds the windows open.'

33. She also said, 'We ought to be armed at all points against the demons. They come at us from outside and if the soul is weak we invite them in. Sometimes a ship is crushed by the battering of heavy seas; sometimes it is sunk because bilge water rises slowly within it. In the same way we are sometimes sunk because we have done evil deeds, and sometimes because our thoughts are evil. So we must both watch for the assaults of unclean spirits, and also cleanse the thoughts of our hearts.'

34. She also said, 'We have no security in this world. The Apostle said, "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). We are sailing on uncharted seas, as the psalmist David said, "Our life is like a sea." Yet some seas have dangerous reefs, some are full of sharks, some seas are calm. It seems as if we are sailing in calm waters, while men of the world are sailing in rough weather. We are

sailing in daylight, led by the sun of righteousness, while they are being driven along in the night of ignorance. Yet it often happens that worldly men, sailing in darkness and through storms, are so afraid of danger that they save the ship by calling upon God and by watchfulness, while we, in our calm waters, become careless, leave the proper course of righteousness, and are sunk.'

35. Hyperichius said, 'Let your mind be always on the kingdom of heaven, and you will soon inherit it.'

36. He also said, 'The life of a monk should be like that of the angels, all fire to burn up sin.'

37. Orsisius said, 'I think that unless a man keeps careful watch over his heart, he will become forgetful and careless in his words. Then the enemy gets a foothold in him and overthrows him. A lamp will give light if it has oil and a trimmed wick. But if the oil is forgotten, it goes out slowly and little by little the shadows creep in upon it. If a mouse comes to it and tries to eat the wick before it is quite out, it is thwarted by the heat of the dying flame. But when it sees that the light is gone and the wick is cool, it knocks the lamp to the floor. If the lamp is earthenware, it is smashed, if it is brass, it is repairable. If the soul is careless, the Holy Spirit goes away from it little by little, until it has grown quite cold: and then the enemy devours the soul, and wickedness smashes it. If a man is good through his love of God and he has been caught in temporary carelessness, the merciful God stirs his mind to remember the punishment waiting for him in the next life and so the mind takes care to be earnest and watches itself carefully, until the time of its visitation.'

38. One hermit visited another hermit and said during their conversation, 'I'm dead to the world.' The other said, 'Don't be so confident until you have actually died. You may say about yourself that you are dead, but Satan is not dead.'

39. A hermit said, 'A monk ought to examine himself every day, morning and evening, to check how far he has kept the Lord's will. He ought to be leading a penitential life all his days. That was the way Arsenius lived.'

40. A hermit said, 'If you lose gold or silver, you can find something as good as you lost. But the man who loses time can never make up what he has lost.'

41. A hermit said, 'Before soldiers or hunters start on expeditions, they do not consider whether some will be wounded while others will be unhurt. Each one fights for himself alone. That is how the monk should be.'

42. A hermit said, 'No one can harm the man at the emperor's side; Satan cannot harm us if we keep ourselves close to God, as it is

written, “Draw nigh to me, and I shall draw nigh unto you” (Zech. 1:3). But because we are so often puffed up with pride, it is easy for the enemy to snatch away our wretched soul to carnal passion and disgrace.’

43. A brother said to a hermit, ‘I don’t find any disturbance in my heart.’ The hermit said, ‘You are like a door swinging open. Anyone who likes can go inside, and come out again, and you don’t notice what is happening. If you had a door that was shut you wouldn’t let wicked thoughts come in, and then you would see them standing outside the door and fighting against you.’

44. They said of a hermit that his thoughts suggested to him, ‘Rest today; do penance tomorrow.’ He contradicted the thoughts, saying, ‘No, I do penance today, and tomorrow the Lord’s will be done.’

45. A hermit said, ‘Unless the inner self lives soberly, the outer self is beyond control.’

46. A hermit said, ‘Satan has three powers, which lead to all the sins. The first is forgetfulness, the second negligence, the third selfish desire. If forgetfulness comes, it causes negligence, negligence is the mother of selfish desire, and by selfish desire we fall. If the mind is serious, it repels forgetfulness, negligence does not come, selfish desire finds no entry, and so with the help of Christ we shall never fall.’

47. A hermit said, ‘Take care to be silent. Empty your mind. Attend to your meditation in the fear of God, whether you are resting or at work. If you do this, you will not fear the attacks of the demons.’

48. A hermit said to a brother, ‘The devil is like a hostile neighbour and you are like a house. The enemy continually throws all the dirt that he can find into your house. It is your business to throw out whatever he throws in. If you neglect to do this, your house will be so full of mud that you will not be able to get inside. From the moment he begins to throw it in, put it out again, bit by bit: and so with Christ’s help your house will remain clean.’

49. A hermit said, ‘When the donkey’s eyes are covered it walks round the mill-wheel. If you uncover its eyes, it will not go on walking in the circle. So if the devil succeeds in covering a man’s eyes, he leads him into every kind of sin. But if the man’s eyes are uncovered, he can more easily escape.’

50. He also used to say that on the mountain of Antony, seven monks took turns at the time of the grape harvest to drive away the birds from the fruit. On the day when it was his turn to guard the grapes, one of them used to shout, ‘Go away, bad thoughts inside, bad birds outside.’

51. A brother collected palm leaves in his cell, but as soon as he sat down to plait them, he thought he should go and visit one of the

hermits. He meditated on it, and said: 'I will go in a few days.' Then he thought, 'Suppose he dies during the next few days, what will I do? I will go now and talk with him, because it is summer time.' Then he thought, 'No, it is not the right moment yet.' Then he said, 'It will be time when I have cut reeds for weaving.' He said, 'I will spread out the palm leaves and then go.' Then at last he said: 'Today is the right time to go.' So he got up and left his pile of palm leaves, took his cloak, and went out. But nearby was another hermit who had the gift of prophetic insight. When he saw the brother hurrying out, he called to him: 'Prisoner, prisoner, where are you running off to? Come here.' He came and his neighbour said to him, 'Go back to your cell.' The brother told him about the ups and downs and indecisions of his mind, and then went back to his cell. As soon as he entered it, he knelt down and did penance. At once the demons shrieked aloud, 'You have conquered us, monk, you have conquered us.' The mat on which he lay was singed as though by fire, and the demons vanished away like smoke, and so the brother learnt of their trickery.

52. They told a story of a hermit who was dying in Scetis. The brothers stool round his bed, and clothed him, and began to weep. But he opened his eyes and began to laugh; this happened three times. So the brothers asked him, 'Abba, why are you laughing when we are weeping?' He told them, 'I laughed the first time because you fear death; I laughed the second time because you are not ready for death; I laughed the third time because I am passing from labour to rest, and yet you weep.' As he said this, he closed his eyes and died.

53. A brother who was living in a cell once came to one of the hermits and said that he was grievously troubled by his thoughts. The hermit said, 'You have thrown away a strong weapon, which is the fear of God, and taken in your hand a stick made of reeds, which is wicked thoughts. You must take up again the fire which is the fear of God. When a wicked thought approaches you, the fear of God will destroy it as a fire burns reeds. Wickedness cannot overcome men who fear God.'

54. One of the hermits said, 'Unless you first hate, you cannot love. Unless you hate sin, you cannot live sinlessly. As it is written, "Depart from evil and do good" (Ps. 37:27). But perseverance is needed for this. Adam, even though he was in Paradise, disobeyed God's command while Job, who was living on a dung hill, kept it. It seems that God requires from us a good intention, that is, that we should fear him always.'

UNCEASING PRAYER

1. They said that on Saturday evening Arsenius used to turn his back to the setting sun and stretch out his hands towards heaven and pray until, at dawn on Sunday, the rising sun lit up his face, and then he sat down again.

2. The brothers asked Agatho, 'Abba, which virtue in our way of life needs most effort to acquire?' He said to them, 'I may be wrong but I think nothing needs so much effort as prayer to God. If anyone wants to pray, the demons try to interrupt the prayer, for they know that prayer is the only thing that hinders them. All the other efforts in a religious life, whether they are made vehemently or gently, have room for a measure of rest. But we need to pray till our dying breath. That is the great struggle.'

3. Dulas, the disciple of Bessarion, said, 'I once went into the cell of my abba, and found him standing up, praying with his hands stretched towards heaven. He stayed like that for fourteen days. At the end he called me and said, "Come with me." We went out and went through the desert. I grew thirsty, and said to him, "Abba, I'm thirsty." He took off his cloak, and went a stone's throw away; he prayed and brought me the cloak full of water. We went to the city of Lycus, and visited John, and greeted him, and prayed. Then they sat down and began to talk about a vision that they had seen. Bessarion said, 'The Lord has commanded the destruction of the pagan temples.' So it was done and they were destroyed.

4. Evagrius said, 'If your attention falters, pray. As it is written, pray in fear and trembling (cf. Phil. 2:12), earnestly and watchfully. We ought to pray like that, especially because our unseen and wicked enemies are trying to hinder us forcefully.'

5. He also said, 'When a distracting thought comes into your head, do not cast around here and there about it in your prayer, but simply repent and so you will sharpen your sword against your assailant.'

6. Bishop Epiphanius of Cyprus, of holy memory, was told this by the abbot of his monastery in Palestine. 'By your prayers we have kept our rule; we carefully observe the offices of terce, sext, none and vespers.' But Epiphanius rebuked him and said, 'Then you are failing to pray at other times. The true monk ought to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). He should always be singing psalms in his heart.'

7. Isaiah said, 'A priest at Pelusium was holding a love-feast: and when the brothers in church were eating and talking, he rebuked them saying, "Be quiet, my brothers. There is one brother eating among you whose prayer is going up to God like a darting flame."'
8. Lot went to Joseph and said, 'Abba, as far as I can, I keep a moderate rule, with a little fasting, and prayer, and meditation, and quiet: and as far as I can I try to cleanse my heart of evil thoughts. What else should I do?' Then the hermit stood up and spread out his hands to heaven, and his fingers shone like ten flames of fire, and he said, 'If you will, you can become all flame.'
9. Some monks called Euchites, or 'men of prayer', once came to Lucius in the ninth region of Alexandria. He asked them, 'What manual work do you do?' They said, 'We do not work with our hands. We obey St Paul's command and pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17). He said to them, 'Don't you eat?' They said, 'Yes, we do.' He said to them: 'When you are eating who prays for you?' Then he asked them, 'Don't you sleep?' They said, 'Yes, we do.' He said, 'Who prays for you while you are asleep?' and they could not answer him. Then he said to them, 'I may be wrong, brothers, but it seems to me that you don't do what you say. I will show you how I pray without ceasing although I work with my hands. With God's help, I sit down with a few palm leaves, and plait them, and say, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great mercy: and according to the multitude of thy mercies do away with mine iniquity' (Ps. 51:1). He asked them, 'Is that prayer, or not?' They said, 'It's prayer all right.' He said, 'When I spend all day working and praying in my heart, I make about sixteen pence. Two of these I put outside the door, and with the rest I buy food. Whoever finds the two pennies outside the door prays for me while I am eating and sleeping: and so by God's grace I fulfil the text, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).'
10. Some brothers asked Macarius, 'How should we pray?' He said, 'There is no need to talk much in prayer. Reach out your hands often, and say, "Lord have mercy on me, as you will and as you know." But if conflict troubles you, say, "Lord, help me." He knows what is best for us, and has mercy.'
11. They said of Sisois that unless he soon lowered his hands when he stood up to pray, his mind was caught up to heaven. So if he happened to be praying with another brother, he quickly lowered his hands and ended his prayer, so that his mind should not be rapt or cause him to go on praying too long for his brother.
12. A hermit used to say, 'Ceaseless prayer soon heals the mind.'
13. One of the hermits said, 'No one can see his face reflected in muddy water; so the soul cannot pray to God with contemplation

unless it is first cleansed of harmful thoughts.'

14. A hermit once visited Mount Sinai. When he was going away, a brother met him, and groaned, saying, 'Abba, we are afflicted by drought. There has been no rain.' He said, 'Why don't you pray and ask God for it?' He replied, 'We've been praying and asking God constantly, and still there is no rain.' The hermit said, 'I don't think you are praying earnestly enough. Shall we see whether that is the case? Let us stand and pray together.' He stretched out his hands to heaven and prayed; and at once rain fell. The brother was afraid at the sight, and fell down and worshipped him. But the hermit fled from that place.

15. The brothers told this story: We once visited some hermits, and after the usual prayer we exchanged greetings and sat down. After we had talked with them, we got ready to go, and asked once again for prayers to be said. But one of the hermits said to us, 'What, haven't you prayed already?' We said: 'Yes, abba, when we came in, we prayed, and since then we have been talking.' He said, 'I may be wrong, brothers; but one of you, while he was sitting and talking with you, offered a hundred and three prayers.' With these words he prayed, and sent us away.

1. Some of the hermits once came to Joseph in Panephysis, to ask him if they should break their fast when they received brothers as guests, to celebrate their coming. Before they asked their question, Joseph said to them, 'Think about what I am going to do today.' He put two seats made of reeds tied in bundles, one on his left and the other on his right, and said, 'Sit down.' Then he went into his cell and put on rags; he came out, and walked past them, and then went in again and put on his ordinary clothes. The visitors were astonished, and asked him what it meant. He said to them, 'Did you see what I did?' They said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Did the rags change me for the better?' They said, 'No.' He said, 'Did good clothes change me for the worse?' They said, 'No.' He said, 'So I am myself whether I wear good clothes or rags. I was not changed for better or worse because I changed my clothes. That is how we ought to be when we receive guests. It is written in the Holy Gospel, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). When visitors come we should welcome them and celebrate with them. It is when we are by ourselves that we ought to be sorrowful.' When they heard this they were amazed that he knew what they intended to ask him, and they praised God.

2. Cassian said, 'We came from Palestine to Egypt, and visited one of the hermits. After he had welcomed us, we asked him, "When you receive guests, why don't you fast? In Palestine they do." He answered, "Fasting is always possible but I cannot keep you here for ever. Fasting is useful and necessary, but we can choose to fast or not fast. God's law demands from us perfect love. I receive Christ when I receive you, so I must do all I can to show you love. When I have said goodbye to you, I can take up my rule of fasting again. 'The sons of the bridegroom cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them; when he is taken from them, then they can fast' (Matt. 9:15)."'

3. Cassian also said, 'We came to another hermit and he invited us to eat, and though we had eaten he urged us to eat more. I said I could not. He replied, "I have already given meals to six different visitors, and have eaten with each of them, and I am still hungry. And you who have only eaten once are so full that you cannot eat with me now?"'

4. In Scetis there once went out an order that they should fast for a week, and then celebrate Easter. During the week some brothers

happened to come into Egypt to visit Moses, and he cooked a little vegetable stew for them. The nearby hermits saw the smoke, and said to the clergy of the church, 'What is that smoke? Moses must be disobeying the order, and cooking in his cell.' The clergy said, 'We will talk to him when he comes.' On Saturday the clergy, who knew the greatness of his way of life, said to Moses in front of the whole congregation, 'Moses, you have broken a commandment of men: but you have kept the commandments of God valiantly.'

5. A brother came to Poemen in the second week of Lent and told him his thoughts, and found peace of mind from his answer. Then he said, 'I almost didn't come to see you today.' Poemen asked him why. He said, 'I was afraid that the door wouldn't be opened as it is Lent.' Poemen answered him, 'It is not wooden doors we were taught to shut; the door we need to keep shut is the mouth.'

6. A brother said to Poemen, 'If I give my brother something, for instance a piece of bread, the demons made the gift worthless by making me think that it was done to please men.' The hermit said to him, 'Even if it is done to please men, we still ought to give our brothers what they need.' He told him this parable: 'In a town there were two farmers. One of them sowed seed, and gathered a poor harvest; the other was idle and did not sow, and had no harvest to gather. If famine came, which of them would survive?' The brother answered, 'The one who sowed seed, even if the harvest was poor.' He said, 'It is the same for us. We sow a few seeds, and they are poor, but in the time of famine we shall not die.'

7. A brother came to a hermit: and as he was taking his leave, he said, 'Forgive me, abba, for preventing you from keeping your rule.' The hermit answered, 'My rule is to welcome you with hospitality, and to send you on your way in peace.'

8. A hermit who was very holy lived near to a community of monks. Some visitors to the community happened to go to see him and made him eat, though it was not the proper time. Later the monks of the community said to him, 'Weren't you upset, abba?' He answered, 'I am upset when I do my own will.'

9. They said there was a man in Syria who lived near the way into the desert, and it was his work faithfully to refresh every monk who came from the desert, at whatever time he came. One day a hermit arrived, and he offered him food. But the hermit refused, saying, 'I am fasting.' The man was saddened, and said, 'Please do not pass over your servant, do not scorn me. Let us pray together. Look, here is a tree; let us obey him for whom the tree bows down when he kneels and prays.' So the hermit knelt and prayed, but nothing happened. Then the man knelt down, and at once the tree bent its trunk. They rejoiced at the

sight, and gave thanks to God who is always doing wonders.

10. Two brothers once came to see a hermit whose custom it was not to eat every day. When he saw them, he welcomed them cheerfully and said, 'A fast has its own reward, but whoever eats because of love, obeys two commandments: he loses his self-will, and he refreshes his brothers.'

11. A hermit in Egypt lived in a desert place and far away lived a Manichaean priest, at least he was one of those whom Manichaeans call priests. While the Manichaean was on his way to visit another of that erroneous sect, he was caught by nightfall in the place where this orthodox holy man lived. He wanted to knock on his door and ask for shelter; but he was afraid to do so, for he knew that he would be recognized as a Manichaean, and thought that he would be denied hospitality. But so severe was his plight that he put that consideration aside and knocked. The hermit opened the door and knew who he was; he welcomed him joyfully, made him pray with him, gave him supper and a bed. The Manichaean lay thinking in the night and wondering, 'Why was he not hostile to me? He is a true servant of God.' At daybreak he got up, and fell at his feet, saying, 'After this I will be orthodox, and I shall not leave you.' So he stayed with him.

12. A monk of the Thebaid received from God the grace of ministry, to serve the poor as they had need. In a village once he happened to be holding a love-feast. A woman dressed in rags came up to him to receive her share. When he saw the rags, he meant to take a great handful, so as to give her a big helping; but his hand was kept nearly shut, and he took only a little. Another, well-dressed, woman came up and, seeing her clothes, he meant to take a little handful for her but his hand was opened, and he took a big helping. So he asked about the women, and found that the well-dressed woman had been a lady who had sunk to poverty and still dressed well because she felt that she had a standard to maintain for her family. But the other had put on rags so that she would receive more.

13. A monk had a poor brother living in the world, to whom he gave all the profit from his work. But the more he gave him, the poorer the brother became. So the monk told a hermit what was happening. The hermit said to him, 'If you'll take my advice, you won't give him anything else, but you'll say, "Brother, I have given you what I had. It is your turn now to work and give me some of your produce." Accept whatever he brings you, and give it to any poor pilgrim or needy person you find, and ask them to pray for him.' The monk listened to this advice, and followed it. When his brother from the world came, he spoke to him as the hermit had advised, and his brother went away sadly. The next day, he brought the monk a few vegetables from his garden. The monk accepted them, and gave them to some hermits,

asking them to pray for his brother. He received a blessing from them and returned home. Later his brother brought him vegetables and three loaves of bread which he accepted and gave away, and again received a blessing. Now the third time his brother brought him expensive food, wine and fish. The monk was astonished at the sight, and called in poor men, and fed them. But he said to his brother from the world, 'Do you need as much food as all that?' His brother said, 'No, not exactly. When I used to accept presents from you, it was as though a fire came into my house and consumed it, but now, when I receive nothing from you, I have plenty, and God blesses me.' So the monk went and told the hermit what had happened. The hermit said to him, 'Don't you know that a monk's work is a fire that consumes whatever it touches? It is best for your brother that he should earn a little by his own efforts, and be prayed for by holy men: then he receives God's blessing, and he will have plenty.'

14. One of the hermits said, 'There are some who do good, yet the devil insinuates a mean spirit into them, so that they lose the reward of all the good they do. Once when I was living in Oxyrhynchus with a priest who was generous in almsgiving, a widow came to ask him for a little barley. He said to her, "Go and fetch some, and I will weigh it for you." She brought him some. But when he weighed the measure she had taken he said, "It is too much," and so he made the widow ashamed. After she had gone, I said, "Priest, did you lend barley to that widow, or what?" He said, "No; I gave it her." So I said, "If you wanted to make her a gift, why were you so exact about the measure that you made her ashamed?"'

15. A hermit lived a common life with another brother, who was a man with a merciful heart. Once, in a time of famine, people came to his door to take part in a love-feast, and he gave bread to everyone who came. When his brother saw this, he said, 'Give me my share of the bread, and do what you like with your share.' So he divided the bread into two, and went on giving away his own share as usual. Crowds flocked to the hermit, hearing that he gave to all comers. God, seeing what he did, blessed that bread. But the brother who had taken his share, gave none away, and when he had eaten all his bread he said to the other hermit, 'I've only got a bit of my bread left, abba; let me come back and live with you.' The hermit said to him, 'Certainly, whatever you like.' So they began to live together again and to have everything in common. Again, they had plenty of food, and again the needy kept coming to receive a love-feast. One day the brother happened to go in and he noticed that there was no bread left. A poor man came, asking for alms. So the hermit said to the brother, 'Give him some bread.' He said, 'There isn't any left, abba.' The hermit said, 'Go and have a look for some.' The brother went in, and saw the bin

full of loaves. He was afraid at the sight, and took some and gave them to the poor man. He recognized the faith and goodness of the hermit, and glorified God.

1. Arsenius, of blessed memory, once said to Alexander, 'When you've finished your palm leaves, come and have supper with me. But if pilgrims arrive, eat with them.' Alexander worked away gently and unhurriedly. At supper time he had not finished his palm leaves. Though he was hungry he wanted to obey the order of Arsenius, so he went on until he had finished the palm leaves. Arsenius noticed he was late and had his own supper for he thought that perhaps pilgrims had come, and that Alexander was eating with them. Alexander finished his task, and in the evening came to see Arsenius. Arsenius said to him, 'Did pilgrims visit you?' He said, 'No.' Arsenius said, 'Then why didn't you come?' He replied, 'Because you told me to come when I had finished the palm leaves. I did what you told me and did not come because I have only just finished the work.' Arsenius admired the exactness of his obedience, and said to him, 'You should lay aside your work sooner, so as to say your psalms, and fetch water for yourself, otherwise your body will soon grow weak.'

2. Abraham came to see Ares, and while they were sitting together, a brother came and asked Ares, 'Tell me, what must I do to be saved?' The hermit said, 'Go, eat bread and salt every evening for a whole year, then come back, and I will talk to you again.' So the brother went away and did so, and at the end of a year came again to see Ares. By chance Abraham was with him again. This time Ares said to the brother, 'Go, fast for a year, and eat every second day.' When he had gone, Abraham said to Ares, 'Why, when you put a light yoke on all the brothers, have you laid such a grievous burden on this brother?' Ares replied, 'Other brothers come to ask questions and go away just as they came. But this brother comes to hear a word for God's sake, and he is one who works hard for the Lord and takes the greatest trouble to do whatever I tell him. That is why I speak the word of God to him.'

3. They told this story of John the Short. He went to live with a hermit from the Thebaid, who was living in the desert of Scetis. His abba once took a dead stick and planted it, and told him, 'Pour a jug of water over its base every day until it bears fruit.' Water was so far from their cell that John had to go off every evening to fetch it and it was dawn before he returned. At the end of three years the stick turned green, and bore fruit. The hermit picked some of the fruit and

took it to church, and said to the brothers, 'Take and eat the fruit of obedience.'

4. They said of John, the disciple of Paul, that he was full of the virtue of obedience. There was a tomb in which lived a dangerous lioness. Paul saw the dung of the lioness lying round and said to John, 'Go and fetch that dung.' John said to him, 'What shall I do, abba, about the lioness?' The hermit said, as a joke, 'If she comes at you, tie her up and bring her here.' So John went there in the evening, and the lioness rushed at him. He obeyed the hermit and ran to catch her, so the lioness turned and fled. John chased her, shouting, 'Wait! My abba told me to tie you up.' He caught her and tied her up. The hermit sat a long time waiting for him, and was getting very anxious because he was late. But at last John came, and brought the lioness with him, tied up. Paul marvelled at the sight. But wanting to humble him, he beat him and said, 'You fool, have you brought me that silly dog?' and he immediately untied her, and drove her away.

5. They said that Silvanus had a disciple in Scetis called Mark, who possessed the virtue of obedience in large measure. He was a copyist of old manuscripts: and the hermit loved him for his obedience. He had seven other disciples, and they were sad that he loved Mark more than them. When the nearby hermits heard that he loved Mark above the others, they took it badly. One day when they visited him, Silvanus took them with him out of his cell, and began to knock on the door of each of his disciples, saying, 'Brother, come out, I have work for you.' Not one of them appeared immediately. When he came to Mark's cell, he knocked, saying, 'Mark,' and as soon as Mark heard the voice of the hermit he came out and Silvanus sent him on some errand. So he said to the other hermits, 'Where are the other brothers?' He went into Mark's cell, and found a book which he had just begun to copy, and he was making the letter O, but when he had heard the hermit's voice, he had not finished the line of the O. The visitors said, 'You are right, abba, and we also love the one whom you love, for God loves him too.'

6. Once Mark's mother came to see him with many attendants. When the hermit went out to receive her, she said: 'Abba, tell my son to come here to me, so that I can see him.' The hermit went to Mark's cell, and said to him, 'Go on, your mother wants to see you.' Mark was dressed in a torn piece of sackcloth patched with rags, and his head and face were dirty from the smoke of the cooking fire. He came out obediently, but closed his eyes, and greeted his mother and her attendants, saying: 'I hope you are well.' None of them, not even his mother, knew who he was. Again she sent a message to the hermit, saying, 'Abba, send me my son, I want to see him.' He said to Mark: 'Didn't I tell you to go and let your mother see you?' Mark said to him,

‘I went as you said, abba. But please, don’t give me that order again, for I am afraid of being disobedient to you.’ The hermit went and said to his mother, ‘Your son is the man who came out and greeted you with “I hope you are well.” ’ He comforted her, and sent her on her way.

7. Four monks once came from Scetis to Pambo, wearing tunics of skin. Each described the goodness of one of the others, though not in his presence. One of them fasted much, one of them owned nothing, the third was a man of great charity, and they said of the fourth that he had lived in obedience to others for twenty-two years. Pambo answered, ‘The latter has greater virtue than the others. Each of you others has to use his own will to keep what he has promised, but he roots out his self-will and makes himself the servant of another’s will. People like that, if they persevere till death, are saints.’

8. Once a man who wanted to become a monk came to see Sisois of the Thebaid. The hermit asked him, ‘Have you any ties in the world?’ He said, ‘I have a son.’ He said to him, ‘Go and throw him in the river, and then you can be a monk.’ He went to throw his boy into the river, but the hermit sent a monk to stop him. He was already holding his son ready to throw him in, when the brother said, ‘Stop! What are you doing?’ He said, ‘The abba told me to throw him in.’ The brother said, ‘Now the abba says, do not throw him in.’ So he left his son, and came back to the hermit; and tested by such obedience he became a strong monk.

9. Syncletica said, ‘It seems to me that for those who live in monasteries obedience is a higher virtue than chastity, however perfect. Chastity is in danger of pride, obedience has the promise of humility.’

10. She also said, ‘We ought to behave always with discretion: and remain in the community, not following our own will, nor seeking our own good. Like exiles we have been separated from the things of the world and have given ourselves in faith to the one Father. We need nothing of what we have left behind. There we had reputation and plenty to eat; here we have little to eat and not much of anything else.’

11. Hyperichius said, ‘The monk’s service is obedience. He who has this shall have his prayers answered, and shall stand by the Crucified in confident faith. For that was how the Lord went to his cross, being made obedient even unto death’ (cf. Phil. 2:8).

12. The hermits said, ‘If a man trusts someone else, and makes him his servant, he ought not to think about God’s commandments, but give himself completely to obey the will of his spiritual father. If he obeys him in everything he will not sin against God.’

13. The hermits used to say, 'God demands this of Christians: to obey the inspired Scriptures, which contain the pattern of what they must say and do, and agree with the teaching of the orthodox bishops and teachers.'

14. A brother from Scetis was going to harvest: and he went to one of the great hermits and said, 'Tell me, abba, what am I to do, while I am harvesting?' The hermit said, 'If I tell you, will you do as I say?' The brother answered, 'Yes; I will obey you.' He said, 'If you do what I say, you will give up your harvesting: and come here, and I will tell you what to do.' So the brother abandoned his harvesting, and came to the hermit who said, 'Go into your cell, and stay there fifty days without a break. Eat bread and salt once a day. At the end of that time I will tell you what to do next.' He did so, and came back to the hermit. The hermit realized that he was in earnest and told him how he ought to live in his cell. The brother went into his cell, and for three days and nights he lay prone upon the ground, in penitence before God. Then the thought came into his mind, 'You are very good, you are a great man,' but he took control of his thoughts, and in humility called his sins to mind, saying, 'What about all the sins I have committed?' If the thought rose in his mind that he had neglected the commandments of God, he said to himself, 'I will offer God a little service, and I believe that He will have mercy upon me.' So he conquered the demons that sent him wicked thoughts: and they appeared before him in a visible form, and said, 'You are making us angry.' He said to them, 'Why?' They said, 'If we praise you, you are quick to be humble; if we humble you, you rise up on high.'

15. The hermits used to say, 'From those who have not long been converted to monastic life, God demands nothing so much as sincere obedience.'

16. An old hermit had a servant, who lived nearby. Once it happened that because the servant did not come, the hermit did not have what he needed, neither food to eat nor materials to work. He was anxious about having neither means of work nor means of keeping alive, and said to his disciple, 'Will you go over there, and summon the servant who usually brings what we need?' He answered, 'I will go if you order me to.' But the hermit would not give him an order to go, for he did not dare to send the monk. After they had suffered for a long time because the servant did not come, the hermit said again to his disciple, 'Now will you go and bring him here?' He answered, 'I will if you want me to.' The disciple was afraid that if he went out he would cause scandal, but so as not to be disobedient to his abba, he agreed to go. The hermit said, 'Go, and believe in the God of your abba, who will protect you in every temptation,' and he prayed, and sent him on his way. The monk came and inquired where the servant lived, and

found his house. The servant happened to be away with all his family except a daughter. When the monk knocked, the daughter opened the door. When he asked her where her father was, she urged him to come into the house, and indeed tried to pull him inside. At first he refused to go in, but in the end she succeeded in persuading him. Then she flung herself at him and tried to tempt him to lie with her. He felt lust rising in him, and his mind was in a turmoil; and he groaned and called out to God, 'Lord, by the prayers of my abba, set me free now.' As soon as he said it, he found himself by the river on the path to the hermitage, and he was restored, unharmed, to his abba.

17. Two men, who were siblings came to live in a monastery. One possessed the virtue of self-control, the other the virtue of obedience, each to a remarkable degree. If the abba said to the second, 'Do this', he did it; if he said, 'Eat at dawn', he ate at dawn. So he gained fame in the monastery for his obedience. But the other brother was stung to envy, and said to himself, 'I will test him and see if he is really so obedient.' He went to the abbot of the monastery, and said to him, 'Send my brother away with me, and we will go somewhere else for a while.' The abbot sent them on their way. Now the ascetic brother wanted to tempt the obedient brother. They came to a river infested by crocodiles. He said to him, 'Walk down into the river, and cross.' He immediately walked into the river and the crocodiles swam to him, and nosed his body, but did not hurt him. When his brother saw what happened, he said, 'Come out of the river.' On their journey they found a corpse lying by the wayside. The ascetic said to his brother, 'If we had an old coat we could put it over the corpse.' He answered, 'We had better pray; perhaps he will live again.' When they had prayed earnestly, the dead man stood up. The ascetic brother was proud and said, 'This dead man has been raised because I am so self-controlled.' But God revealed what had happened to the abbot of the monastery, how the ascetic brother had tempted his brother, how the crocodiles had not hurt him, and how the dead had been raised. When they came back to the monastery, the abbot said to the ascetic, 'Why did you behave like that to your brother? The dead man was raised because your brother is so obedient.'

18. A secular man who had three sons renounced the world. He left his sons in the city and went to live in a monastery. After three years there he began to get anxious when he remembered his three sons and was very worried about them; he had not told his abbot of their existence. The abbot, seeing he was upset, asked him, 'Why are you worried?' So he told him that he had three sons in the city and wanted to bring them to the monastery. The abbot told him to go and bring them. When he arrived in the city, he found that two of his sons had died and only one survived. He took him back to the monastery, and

looked for the abbot but could not find him. He asked the brothers where the abbot was and they told him that he had gone to the bakery. The man took his child in his arms and went to the bakery. The abbot saw him coming, and greeted him; he picked up the child, and hugged and kissed him. Then he said to the father, 'Do you love him?' He replied, 'Yes I do.' Then the abbot said, 'Do you love him with all your heart?' He answered, 'Yes.' At this the abbot said, 'Then, if you love him so much, pick him up and throw him into the oven, now, while it is red hot.' So the father took his son and threw him into the red-hot oven. In that moment the oven was transformed and became as cool as the dew. So the father received praise for an act like that of the patriarch Abraham.

19. A hermit said, 'Someone who hands over his soul in obedience to a spiritual guide has a greater reward than one who retires alone to a hermitage.' He also said this: 'One of the fathers saw a vision of four ranks in heaven. The first rank was of those who are sick, yet give thanks to God. The second rank was of those who minister to the sick willingly and generously. The third rank was of those who live in the desert, seeing no one. The fourth rank was of those who for God's sake put themselves under obedience to spiritual guides. But those who live in obedience in the fourth rank wore necklaces and crowns of gold and shone more than the others. I said to the one who showed me the vision, 'How is it that the rank which is lowest shines the most?' He replied, 'Those who care for others do what they themselves want to do. Hermits follow their own will in withdrawing from the world. But the obedient have gone beyond their self-will, and depend only on God and the word of their spiritual guides: that is why they shine the most.' Learn by this how great a good is obedience if it is for God's sake and strive to win some trace at least of this virtue. It is the salvation of the faithful, the mother of all virtue, the entry into the kingdom; it raises us from earth to heaven; obedience lives in the same place as the angels; it is the food of the saints who by its nourishment grow to fullness of life.'

1. Antony was confused as he meditated upon the depths of God's judgements, and he asked God, 'Lord, how is it that some die young and others grow old and sick? Why are there some poor and some rich? Why are there those who are bad and rich and oppress the good poor?' He heard a voice saying to him, 'Antony, worry about yourself; these other matters are up to God, and it will not do you any good to know them.'

2. Antony said to Poemen, 'Our great work is to lay the blame for our sins upon ourselves before God, and to expect to be tempted to our last breath.'

3. Antony also said, 'I saw the devil's snares set all over the earth, and I groaned and said, "What can pass through them?" I heard a voice saying, "Humility".'

4. Once some brothers came to visit Antony, and Joseph was with them. Antony, wanting to test them, began to speak about holy Scripture. He asked the younger monks first the meaning of text after text, and each of them answered as well as he could. To each he said, 'You have not yet found the right answer.' Then he said to Joseph, 'What do you think is the meaning of this word?' He replied, 'I don't know.' Antony said, 'Indeed Joseph alone has found the true way, for he said he did not know.'

5. Some demons once came near Arsenius in his cell, and they were troubling him. Then some brothers who usually ministered to him arrived. As they stood outside the cell, they heard him crying aloud to the Lord, 'Lord, do not leave me, though I have done nothing good in your sight. Grant me, Lord, by your loving kindness, to make at least the first beginnings of good.'

6. They said of Arsenius that while he was in the Emperor's palace he was the best-dressed person there and while he was leading the life of a monk, no one was clothed in worse rags.

7. Arsenius once asked an old Egyptian monk for advice about his temptations. Another monk who saw this said, 'Arsenius, how is it that you, who are so learned in Greek and Latin, are asking that uneducated peasant about your temptations?' He answered, 'I have a lot of worldly knowledge of Greek and Latin: but I have not yet been able to learn the alphabet of this peasant.'

8. The hermits said that once someone gave the brothers in Scetis a few figs: but because they were so few, they did not give any to Arsenius, for fear he should be offended by the smallness of the present. When he heard of this, he did not go out as usual to the service with the brothers, and said, 'You have excommunicated me, by not giving me the food which the Lord sent to the brothers; it was because I was not worthy to receive it.' They were edified by his humility, and the priest took him some of the figs, and brought him back to the congregation content.

9. They used to say of Arsenius that no one could understand the depths of his monastic life. Once when he was living in Lower Egypt, and suffering from importunate visitors, he decided to leave his cell. He took nothing with him, and said to his disciples, Alexander and Zoilus, 'Alexander, you go on board a ship, and you, Zoilus, come with me to the Nile and find me a little boat that is sailing to Alexandria, and then go and join your brother.' Zoilus was sad at this, but said nothing, and so they parted. Arsenius went down to the district near Alexandria, and there fell gravely ill. His disciples said to each other, 'Do you think one of us has upset him? Is that why he has left us?' They examined themselves, but could not see any way in which they had been ungrateful to him, or had ever disobeyed him. When Arsenius had recovered from his illness, he said to himself, 'I will go back to my brothers.' So he went to the place called Petra, where Alexander and Zoilus, his servants, were. While he was by the river bank, he met an Ethiopian girl, who came up and touched his cloak. He rebuked her but she said, 'If you are a monk, go to the mountain.' At these words he was stricken to the heart, and said to himself, 'Arsenius, if you are a monk, go to the mountain.' On the way his disciples Alexander and Zoilus met him, and fell at his feet. Arsenius also threw himself on the ground, and they all wept. Then Arsenius said, 'Didn't you hear that I was ill?' They said to him, 'Yes, we heard about it.' He said, 'Then why didn't you come to see me?' Alexander said, 'We were upset by your going away from us, for many people were shocked about it, and said, "They must have disobeyed the hermit or surely he would not have left them." ' The hermit said to them, 'Yes, I knew that would be said. But now it shall be said, "The dove found rest for her foot, and so returned to Noah in the ark." ' The feelings of his disciples were healed by this, and they stayed with him to the end of his life. When he lay dying they were very distressed. He said to them, 'The hour is not yet come, but when it does come I will tell you. You will be judged with me before the judgement seat of Christ, if you let anyone else touch my dead body.' They said, 'Whatever shall we do? We don't know how to clothe or bury a dead body.' Then Arsenius said, 'I suppose you know enough to tie a rope to

my leg and pull me up the mountain?' When he was about to commit his soul to God, they saw him weeping, and said, 'Abba, are even you afraid of death?' He said, 'Yes, indeed. The fear which possesses me now has been with me since I became a monk: and I am very much afraid.' So he slept in peace. Arsenius always used to say this, 'Why, words, did I let you get out? I have often been sorry that I have spoken, never that I have been silent.' When Poemen heard that Arsenius had departed this life, he wept, and said, 'You are blessed, Arsenius; for you wept for yourself in this world. Whoever does not weep for himself in this world, shall lament for ever in the next. We cannot escape lamentation; if we do not lament here of our own will, we shall later be forced to lament against our will.'

10. Daniel said of Arsenius that he never wanted to discuss any question about Scripture, though he was wonderful at expounding it when he wanted to, and that he was very reluctant to write anyone a letter. When from time to time he came to the meeting in church, he sat behind a pillar so that no one should see his face, and so he himself should not be distracted. Like Jacob, he looked like an angel, having white hair, a man lovely to look at, yet somewhat dried up. He had a long beard that reached down to his waist: his eyes were dim with constant weeping; and although he was tall, his body was bent. He died at the age of ninety-five. He lived for forty years in the palace of the Emperor Theodosius the Great of holy memory, the father of Arcadius and Honorius, then he lived for forty years in Scetis, ten years in the place called Troe, above Babylon, near the city of Memphis, and three years in Canopus near Alexandria. Then he returned to Troe for two more years, and there ended his life in peace and the fear of God. He was 'a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith' (Acts 11:24).

11. John told this story. Anub and Poemen and some others who were born of the same mother were monks in Scetis. Some savage Mazicae came and sacked Scetis. The brothers fled and went to a place called Terenuthis; they stayed a few days there in an old temple while they discussed where to live. Anub said to Poemen, 'Of your kindness, let me live apart from you and our brothers, so that we do not see each other during this week.' Poemen said, 'Let us do as you wish,' so that is what they did. There was a stone statue in the temple. Every day at dawn Anub got up and pelted the face of the statue with stones and every day at evening he said to it, 'Forgive me.' Every day for a week he did this: and on Saturday they met again. Poemen said to Anub, 'I saw you throwing stones at the face of the statue every day this week, and later doing penance to the statue. A true Christian would not have done that.' Anub answered, 'I did it for your sake. When you saw me throwing stones at the statue's face, did it speak? Was it angry?'

Poemen said, 'No.' He said, 'When I did penance before the statue, was it moved in its heart? Did it say, "I won't forgive you?"' Poemen answered, 'No.' Anub said, 'Here we are, seven brothers. If we want to stay together, we must become like this statue, which is untroubled by the injuries done it. If you will not become like this statue, see, there are four doors to this temple, and each of us may go in the direction he chooses.' At these words they fell upon the ground before Anub, and said to him, 'Let it be as you say, abba. We will do what you tell us.' Poemen described what happened afterwards. 'We remained together all our lives, doing our work and everything else as Anub directed us. He appointed one of us as a steward, and we ate whatever he put before us; no one could have said: "Bring something else to eat," or "I will not eat that." So we passed our lives in quiet and peace.'

12. They said of Ammon that some people asked him to arbitrate in their quarrel but the hermit took no notice of them. So a woman said to her neighbour, 'What a fool this hermit is!' Ammon heard her; and called her, and said, 'You can't imagine how hard I have tried in different deserts to be thought of as a fool! But now that you have recognized that it is part of my nature to be foolish you have made all my efforts to pretend to folly pointless.'

13. There was a bishop of the city of Oxyrhynchus called Affy. They said that while he was a monk, he treated his body very severely. When he became a bishop, he wanted to continue in his city the austerities that he had practised in the desert, but he could not. So he fell prostrate before God and said, 'Do you think, my Lord, that your grace has left me because I have become a bishop?' He was answered, 'No, but in the desert you had no man to help you, and God alone sustained you. Now you are in the world, and have men to help you.'

14. Daniel said that in Babylon there was a nobleman's daughter, who was possessed by a devil. Her father asked a monk for help. The monk said to him, 'No one can cure your daughter except some hermits I know: and if you go to them, they will refuse to do it from motives of humility. Let us do it this way: when they come to the city bringing their produce for sale, tell them that you want to buy what they have. When they come into the house to receive the money, we will ask them to pray, and I believe that your daughter will be cured.' So they went into the street, and found a disciple of a hermit who was sitting there to sell his baskets. They took him back with them to the house, as if to give him the money for his wares. When the monk came into the house, the girl who was troubled with the demon went up to him and slapped him. He followed the Lord's commandment, and turned to her the other cheek. The demon was forced out, and began to cry: 'Violence! The commandment of Jesus Christ is driving me out;' the

girl was healed at that moment. When they came back to the hermit, they told him what had happened, and he glorified God, saying, 'The pride of devils must fall before humble obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ.'

15. Evagrius said, 'To go against self is the beginning of salvation.'

16. Serapion said, 'I have afflicted my body far more than my son Zacharias, but I cannot equal his humility or his silence.'

17. Moses said to brother Zacharias, 'Tell me what to do.' At these words Zacharias threw himself at his feet, saying, 'Why ask me, abba?' The hermit said, 'I tell you, my son Zacharias, I saw the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and so I cannot avoid asking you.' Then Zacharias took his cowl from his head, and put it beneath his feet and stamped on it, and said, 'Unless a man stamps upon self like that, he cannot be a monk.'

18. Poemen said, 'Moses asked the monk Zacharias, who was dying, "What can you see?" He said, "Nothing better than being silent, abba." Moses said, "Indeed, my son, keep silent." At the moment of his death Isidore looked up to heaven, and said, "Rejoice, my son Zacharias, for the gates of the kingdom of heaven are opened to you."

19. Theophilus of holy memory, the bishop of Alexandria, once went to the mount of Nitria, and a hermit of Nitria came to see him. The bishop said, 'What have you discovered in your life, abba?' The hermit answered, 'To blame myself unceasingly.' The bishop said, 'That is the only way to follow.'

20. When Theodore was eating with the brothers, they received the cup with silent reverence, and did not follow the usual custom of receiving the cup with 'Excuse me'. Theodore said, 'The monks have lost their manners and do not say "Excuse me".'

21. They said of Theodore that, after he was ordained deacon in Scetis, he refused to minister in the services but escaped to various places to avoid having to do so. The hermits brought him back, and said, 'Do not desert your ministry.' Theodore said to them, 'Let me go, and I will pray to God. If he shows me that I ought to act as a minister, I will do so.' He prayed to God saying, 'Show me, Lord, if it is your will that I minister as a deacon.' There appeared a pillar of fire between earth and heaven, and a voice was heard saying, 'If you can become like this pillar, go, and exercise your ministry.' When he heard this, he determined never to exercise his ministry. When he came back to the church, they did penance before him, and said, 'If you do not want to take part in the service, at least hold the chalice.' But he refused, saying, 'If you do not let me alone, I will leave this place entirely.' So they let him alone.

22. He also said, 'Humility and the fear of God surpass all the other

virtues.’ ‘The gateway is humility: our predecessors suffered much and therefore entered heaven joyfully.’

23. John of the Thebaid said, ‘Above all a monk should be humble. For this is the Saviour’s first commandment, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).’

24. The brothers in Scetis once met and began to discuss Melchizedek the priest, but they forgot to ask Copres to come. Later, they summoned him and asked him what he thought about the question. He struck his mouth three times and said, ‘Alas for you, Copres. You have left undone what God commanded you to do, and you have dared to inquire into things that he did not ask of you.’ At these words the brothers scattered, each to his own cell.

25. Macarius once told this story about himself: When I was a young man, and living in my cell in Egypt, they caught me, and made me a cleric in a village. Because I did not want to minister, I fled to another place. A man of the world, but of a devout life, came to help me, and took what I made with my hands and ministered to my needs. It happened that a girl of the village was tempted by the devil and seduced. When she was seen to be pregnant, she was asked who was the father of the child and she said, ‘It was this hermit who slept with me.’ They came out, arrested me, and brought me back to the village; they hung dirty pots and jug handles on my neck, and made me walk round the village, beating me as I went, and saying, ‘This monk has seduced our girl. Away with him, away with him.’ They beat me until I was almost dead but another hermit came and said, ‘How long have you been beating that stranger monk?’ The man who used to minister to my needs followed behind, much ashamed, and they heaped insults on him, saying, ‘You supported this hermit, and look what he has done.’ The parents of the girl said that they would not let me go unless I found someone to guarantee her support. I spoke to the man who used to minister to me and asked him to be my guarantor, and he gave a pledge on my behalf. I went back to my cell, and I gave him all the baskets I had, and said, ‘Sell them, and give my wife some food.’ Then I said to myself, ‘Macarius, since you have found a wife for yourself, you need to work much harder to support her.’ So I worked night and day and passed on to her the money that I made. When it was time for the unfortunate girl to bear a child, she spent many days in labour, and still did not produce the baby. They said to her, ‘What’s the matter?’ She said, ‘I know why I am in agony so long.’ Her parents asked her why. She said, ‘I accused that hermit falsely, for he had nothing to do with it; the father is a young man named so-and-so.’ The man who ministered to me heard this, and came to me with joy saying, ‘The girl could not bear her child, until she confessed that you had nothing to do with it and that she had told lies about you. Look,

all the villagers want to come to your cell and glorify God, and ask your pardon.' When I heard this, I did not want them to trouble me, so I rose and fled here to Scetis. That was why I began to live here.

26. Macarius was once returning to his cell from the marsh carrying palm leaves. The devil met him by the way, with a sickle, and wanted to run him through with it but he could not. The devil said, 'Macarius, I suffer a lot of violence from you, for I can't overcome you. For whatever you do, I do also. If you fast, I eat nothing; if you keep watch, I get no sleep. There is only one quality in which you surpass me.' Macarius said to him, 'What is that?' The devil answered, 'Your humility; that is why I cannot prevail against you.'

27. Mathois once went from Raythu to the country of Gebalon, and his brother was with him. The bishop of Gebalon came to him, and ordained him priest. At supper the bishop said, 'Forgive me, abba. I know that you did not want to be ordained: but I dared to do it so that you would give me your blessing.' The hermit said humbly, 'It is true that I did not much want ordination, but I am more upset by the fact that I must be divided from my brother who is with me, for by myself I cannot offer all the prayers that we do together.' The bishop said, 'If you know that he is a worthy person, I will ordain him too.' Mathois said, 'Whether he is worthy I do not know but one thing I do know, that is that he is better than I am.' So the bishop ordained his brother too. When they died neither of them had offered the sacrifice at the altar. The hermit said, 'I trust God, that perhaps he will not judge me hardly for my ordination, provided I do not dare to consecrate the offering. For such consecration is the duty of men who live innocently.'

28. Mathois said, 'The nearer a man comes to God, the more he sees himself to be a sinner. Isaiah the prophet saw the Lord and knew himself to be wretched and unclean (Is. 6:5).'

29. They said of Moses that when he was ordained, they put the pall on his shoulders. The archbishop said to him, 'Look at that, here you are clothed in white and ready for your ordination, Moses.' He answered, 'White outside, Lord Bishop, or white inside, do you think?' The archbishop, wishing to test him, said to the clergy, 'When Moses comes to the altar, turn him away but follow him and listen to what he says.' They began to drive him from the church, saying, 'Get out, Ethiopian.' As he went out, he said to himself, 'You thing of dust and ashes, they have done you a good turn. You are not a man, how dare you remain in the company of men?'

30. While Poemen was living in a community, he heard of Nesteros and wanted to see him. So he sent a message to his abbot to ask him to let Nesteros come to see him, but the abbot did not want to and

refused. A few days afterwards the steward of the monastery asked the abbot to let him go and see Poemen, so that he could tell him his thoughts. When the abbot was giving him leave, he said to him, 'Take with you the brother Nesteros whom the hermit asked me to send. I did not dare to let him go alone, and have put off sending him until now.' When the steward reached the hermit, he talked to him about his thoughts, and the hermit healed his mind by his answers. Then Poemen turned to the brother and said, 'Nesteros, how is it that you have the strength, if there is trouble in the monastery, not to say anything but remain at peace?' The brother had to be pressed by him for an answer. In the end he said, 'It is like this, abba. When I first entered the community, I said to my soul, You and the donkey must be alike. The donkey says nothing when he is beaten. That is what you must do, as you read in the psalm, "I am become as a beast before thee, yet I am always with thee" (Ps. 73:22-23).'

31. They told this story of Olympius in Scetis. He was a slave, and each year went down to Alexandria carrying what he had earned to his masters. They met him, and greeted him. Olympius put water in a basin and brought it to wash his masters' feet. But they said to him, 'No, abba, please do not lay such a burden on us.' He answered, 'I confess that I am your slave: and I am grateful that you have let me go free to serve God. So I still wash your feet, and here is what I have earned.' They refused to accept it. He said, 'Very well, if you will not accept my earnings, I shall stay here and be your slave again.' They revered him, and gave him leave to do what he wanted. They brought him back to the desert with honour, and gave him what he needed to make a love-feast on their behalf, and he was renowned in Scetis.

32. Poemen said, 'We ought always to be absorbing humility and the fear of God, as our nostrils breathe air in and out.'

33. A brother asked Poemen, 'How ought I to behave in my cell in the place where I live?' He answered, 'Be as prudent as a stranger; and wherever you are, do not expect your words to be taken seriously when you speak, and you will find peace.'

34. He also said, 'The tools of the soul are these: to cast oneself down in God's sight; not to lift oneself up; and to put self-will behind one.'

35. He also said, 'Do not be proud of yourself, but stay with anyone who is living a good life.'

36. He also said, 'A brother asked Alonius, "What is humility?" The hermit said, "To be lower than brute beasts and to know that they are not condemned." '

37. He also said, 'Humility is the ground on which the Lord ordered the sacrifice to be offered.'

38. He also said, 'If a man stays in his own place, he will not be

troubled.'

39. He also said, 'Once when the monks were sitting down to eat, Alonius stood and waited on them: and when they saw it, they praised him. But he said not a word. So one of them whispered to him, "Why do you not answer when the brothers praise you?" Alonius said, "If I answer them, I will be pleased that I have been praised." '

40. Joseph told this story: Once when we were sitting with Poemen, he talked about 'abba' Agatho. We said to him: 'He is a young man, why do you call him abba?' Poemen said, 'His speech is such that we must call him "abba".'

41. They said of Poemen that he never wanted to cap the saying of others, but always praised what had been said.

42. Once Theophilus of holy memory, the archbishop of Alexandria, came to Scetis. The brothers gathered together and said to Pambo, 'Speak to the bishop, that he may be edified.' Pambo replied, 'If he is not edified by my silence, my speech certainly will not edify him.'

43. A brother named Pystus told this story: Seven of us hermits went to Sisois, who was living in the island of Clysma. When we asked him to give us a word, he answered, 'I'm afraid I'm very ignorant. But I once went to see Hor and Athrem when Hor had been ill for eighteen years. I began to beg them to speak a word to me. Hor said, "What can I say to you? Go and do whatever you think right. God is the God of the man who extracts from himself more than he can do, and carries all by violence." These men, Hor and Athrem, were not from the same province. But there was much love between them until their death. Athrem was a man of perfect obedience, Hor of great humility. I spent a few days with them, observing their virtues; and I saw Athrem do a wonderful thing. Someone brought them a little fish, and Athrem wanted to prepare it for his brother, Hor. So Athrem took a knife and cut into the fish: but at that moment Hor called him, "Athrem, Athrem." He left the knife in the middle of the fish and did not finish the cut but ran to Hor. I was astonished at his obedience, and that he did not say, "Wait until I have cut up this fish." So I said to Athrem, "Where did you learn such obedience?" He answered me, "It is not mine: it is his." He said, "Come and see his obedience." He intentionally cooked some fish badly, and put a piece in front of Hor; he ate it without saying a word. Athrem said, "Was it good, abba?" He answered, "Very good." Then he brought him another piece, very well cooked, and said, "Look here, I have ruined it, abba, by cooking it badly." Hor answered, "Yes, you have cooked it rather badly." Athrem turned to me and said, "Did you see his obedience?" I left them and ever since I have tried, as far as I could, to practise what I saw.' All this was told the brothers by Sisois. One of us asked him, 'Please,

‘speak a word to us.’ He said, ‘Whoever has limitless knowledge understands the Scriptures perfectly.’ Another of us asked him, ‘What is pilgrimage, abba?’ He answered, ‘To keep silent: and wherever you go say, “I am at peace with all men”: that is pilgrimage.’

44. A brother once came to Sisois on the mountain of Antony, and as they were talking he said to Sisois, ‘Have you reached the stature of Antony yet, abba?’ He answered, ‘If I had a single thought like Antony, I should leap toward heaven like a flame. But I know myself to be someone who can only with an effort keep his thoughts in check.’

45. The same brother asked him, ‘Do you think Satan persecuted the men of old as he persecutes us?’ Sisois said, ‘More, for now his doom has drawn nearer, and he is weakened.’

46. Some others came to hear a word from Sisois. He said nothing to them, but kept repeating, ‘Forgive me.’ They saw his baskets, and said to his disciple, Abraham, ‘What are you doing with those baskets?’ He answered, ‘We sell them now and then.’ Sisois heard this and said, ‘And so Sisois eats now and then.’ They were very edified at his humility, and went away happy.

47. A brother said to Sisois, ‘I look into my own mind and I see that it is recollected and intent upon God.’ Sisois said to him, ‘It is nothing special that your mind should be with God. The great thing is to see yourself to be lower than every created being. Bodily toil will put that right, and lead you on the way to humility.’

48. Syncletica of blessed memory said, ‘A ship cannot be built without nails and no one can be saved without humility.’

49. Hyperichius said, ‘The tree of life is high, and humility climbs it.’

50. He also said, ‘Imitate the publican, to prevent yourself being condemned with the Pharisee. Follow the gentleness of Moses, and hollow out the rocky places of your heart, so that you turn them into springs of water.’

51. Orsisius said, ‘If you put a piece of unbaked tiling in a building with a river nearby, it does not last a day. If it is baked, it is as good as stone. So it is with those of worldly wisdom, who are not proved by the word of God, as Joseph was proved at his beginning. To live among men is to be tempted often. It is good that a man should know his weakness, and not pick up too heavy a burden at first. But those of strong faith cannot be moved. Take the life of the patriarch Joseph and see what grievous temptations he suffered in a country where there was no trace of the true worship of God. But the God of his fathers was with him, and kept him safe in every trial, and he is now with his fathers in the kingdom of heaven. So let us own our weakness, and struggle onward. It is hard for us to escape the

judgement of God.'

52. There was an old hermit in the desert who said to himself that he was perfectly virtuous. He prayed to God and said, 'Show me what makes me perfect, and I will do it.' But God wanted to humble him, and said, 'Go to that archimandrite, and do what he tells you.' God gave a revelation to the archimandrite, before the hermit came, and said, 'A hermit is soon coming to see you. Tell him to take a whip and go and herd your swine.' The hermit arrived, knocked at the door, and went to see the archimandrite; they greeted each other, and sat down. The hermit said, 'Tell me what I must do to be saved.' The archimandrite said, 'Will you do what I tell you?' He said, 'Yes.' The archimandrite said, 'Take this whip and go and herd the swine.' When those who knew the hermit and his reputation saw that he had gone to be a swineherd, they said, 'Look at that hermit who had won such a great reputation. Look what he is doing. He has gone mad, and is troubled by a demon, and is herding swine.' But God looked on his humility, and saw how he bore these insults with patience, and told him to go back to his cell.

53. A demoniac, frothing terribly at the mouth, struck an old hermit on the jaw, and he turned the other cheek. This humility tortured the demon like flames, and drove him out there and then.

54. A hermit said to a brother, 'When a proud or vain thought enters your mind, examine your conscience to see if you are keeping God's commandments; ask yourself if you love your enemies; if you rejoice in your enemy's triumph, and if you are sad at his downfall; do you know yourself to be an unprofitable servant and a sinner beyond all others? But not even then must you think that you have corrected all your faults; to entertain such a thought as that would undo all the other good you have done.'

55. A hermit said to a brother, 'Do not measure yourself against your brother, saying that you are more serious or more chaste or more understanding than he is. But be obedient to the grace of God, in the spirit of poverty, and in love unfeigned. The efforts of a man swollen with vanity are futile. It is written, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12); "let your speech be seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6) and so you will be dependent upon Christ.'

56. A hermit said, 'He who is praised and honoured above what he deserves suffers grievous loss. He who receives no honour at all among men, shall be glorified hereafter.'

57. A brother asked a hermit, 'Is it good to be always repenting?' He answered, 'We have seen Joshua the son of Nun; it was when he was lying prostrate on his face that God appeared to him' (cf. Josh. 5:14).

58. A hermit was asked why we are troubled by demons and he

answered, 'Because we throw away our armour, that is, humility, poverty, patience and men's scorn.'

59. A brother asked a hermit, 'If a brother brings me gossip from the world, abba, shall I tell him not to tell it to me?' The hermit said, 'No.' The brother said, 'Why?' The hermit answered, 'Because we cannot stop ourselves doing the same. We should find ourselves doing what we are telling our neighbour not to do.' The brother said, 'Then what is best?' He answered, 'If we could keep silence, that would be better for us and for our neighbour as well.'

60. A hermit was asked, 'What is humility?' He said, 'It is if you forgive a brother who has wronged you before he is sorry.'

61. A hermit said, 'In every trial do not blame other people but blame yourself, saying, "This has happened to me because of my sins." '

62. A hermit said, 'I never push myself up above my station; and I am untroubled when I am put in a low place. All the time I try to pray God to strip me of my unregenerate nature.'

63. A brother asked a hermit, 'What is humility?' He answered, 'To do good to them that do evil to you.' The brother said, 'Suppose a man cannot attain that standard, what is he to do?' The hermit answered, 'He should run away, and choose silence.'

64. A brother asked a hermit, 'What is the work of pilgrimage?' He said, 'I know a monk who was on pilgrimage and came into a church where a love-feast was being held, and he sat down to eat with the monks. But some of them said, "Who brought that man in here?" They said to him, "Get out of here." He rose from the table and went out. But some of the others were sorry that he had been driven away and went out and brought him back. Then someone asked him, "How did you feel when you were driven out and then brought back?" He said, "I thought that I was no better than a dog, and a dog goes out when he is chased out and comes back when he is called." '

65. Some people once came to a hermit in the Thebaid to ask him to cure a demoniac whom they brought with them. After the hermit had been asked to do this for some time, he said to the demon, 'Go out of God's creature.' The demon answered, 'I will, but first let me ask you a question; tell me, who are the goats and who are the sheep?' The hermit said, 'The goats are people like myself; who the sheep are, God alone knows.' The demon shouted aloud at the words, crying, 'Look here, I am going out because of your humility,' and he went out at that moment.

66. An Egyptian monk was living in the suburbs of Constantinople: and when the Emperor Theodosius II passed that way he left his train of courtiers and came unattended to the cell. The monk opened the door to his knock, and at once recognized that he was the Emperor,

but he received him as though he was only one of the imperial guards. When he had come in, they prayed together and sat down. The Emperor began to ask him, 'How are the hermits in Egypt?' He answered, 'They are all praying for your salvation.' The Emperor looked round the cell to see if he had any food, and saw nothing except a basket with a little bread, and a flagon of water. The monk said to him, 'Will you take a little to eat?' He put the bread in front of him, and mixed oil and salt, and gave him that to eat and drink. The Emperor said to him, 'Do you know who I am?' He said, 'God knows who you are.' The Emperor said, 'I am the Emperor Theodosius.' The monk at once fell down before him and did humble obeisance. The Emperor said, 'Blessed are you, for you have an untroubled life, without thought of the world. I tell you truly, I was born an emperor and I have never enjoyed bread and water as I have today: I have eaten with real pleasure.' He began to do honour to the monk, so the hermit went out, and fled back to Egypt.

67. The hermits said, 'We become more humbled when we are tempted, because God, knowing our weakness, protects us. But if we boast of our own strength, he takes away his protection, and we are lost.'

68. The devil appeared to a monk disguised as an angel of light, and said to him, 'I am the angel Gabriel, and I have been sent to you.' But the monk said, 'Are you sure you weren't sent to someone else? I am not worthy to have an angel sent to me.' At that the devil vanished.

69. The hermits said, 'If an angel really appears to you, do not accept it as a matter of course, but humble yourself, and say, "I live in my sins and am not worthy to see an angel."'

70. They said of another hermit, that while he was undergoing temptation in his cell, he saw the demons face to face, and despised them. The devil, seeing himself overcome, came and showed himself, saying, 'I am Christ.' The hermit looked at him, and then shut his eyes. The devil said, 'I am Christ, why have you shut your eyes?' The hermit answered, 'I do not want to see Christ in this life, but in the next.' The devil vanished at these words.

71. The demons, wanting to tempt a hermit, said to him, 'Would you like to see Christ?' He said, 'A curse be upon you and him by whom you speak. I believe my Christ when He said, "If anyone says to you, 'Lo, here is Christ,' or 'Lo, there,' do not believe him" (Matt. 24:23).' They vanished at the words.

72. They said of a hermit that he went on fasting for seventy weeks, eating a meal only once a week. He asked God the meaning of a text of the holy Scriptures and God did not reveal it to him. So he said to himself, 'I have worked hard and gained nothing. I will go to my

brother and ask him.’ Just as he had shut his door on the way out, an angel of the Lord was sent to him; and the angel said, ‘The seventy weeks of your fast have not brought you near to God but now you are humbled and going to your brother, I have been sent to show you the meaning of the text.’ He explained to him what he had asked, and went away.

73. A hermit said, ‘If anyone, in humility and the fear of God, orders a monk to do something, the very word, spoken for God’s sake, makes the monk ready, and obedient to the command. But if he gives the command because he wants to give orders, if he sets himself up as an authority and seeks power over the monk, and does not give a command in the fear of God, God sees the secrets of the heart and does not let the monk obey him. Everyone knows whether his orders are from God or from self-will and desire for power. An order from God is given with humility and gentleness; an order given out of a desire for power is done with anger and anxiety, for it is of the devil.’

74. A hermit said, ‘I would rather be defeated and humble than win and be proud.’

75. A hermit said, ‘Do not ignore your neighbour for you do not know whether God’s Spirit is in you or in him. I tell you that your servant is your neighbour.’

76. A brother asked a hermit, ‘If I live with other monks, and see something wrong, do you want me to say something about it?’ The hermit replied, ‘If some are older than you, or your contemporaries, you will have more peace of mind in keeping silent for you will find peace in putting yourself below the others.’ The brother said to him, ‘How can I do that, abba? For my thoughts would trouble me.’ The hermit said to him, ‘If you are worrying about the matter, offer a piece of advice, once, with humility. If they do not listen to you, leave what you have done in God’s sight, and He will help you. In this way the worshipper of God lays himself before God, and does not follow his self-will. But take care that your anxiety be of God. In any case, as far as I can see, it is good to be silent, for silence is humility.’

77. A brother asked a hermit, ‘What is the way to make progress?’ The hermit answered, ‘Humility. The more we bend ourselves to humility, the more we are lifted up to make progress.’

78. A hermit said, ‘If anyone says “Forgive me”, and humbles himself, he burns up the demons that tempt him.’

79. A hermit said, ‘Even if you have succeeded in the habit of keeping silent, you should not have that in you as though it was a kind of virtue, but say: “I am not worthy to speak.” ’

80. Another hermit said: ‘Unless the miller blindfolds the donkey in the treadmill, it will turn round and eat the corn. God has mercifully

blindfolded us, so that we cannot see the good that we do, for then we should perhaps praise ourselves and lose our reward. That is why we are left for a time with bad thoughts, so that when we see them, we judge and condemn ourselves. Those very thoughts are the cloth that blindfolds us and prevents goodness from being seen. When a man accuses himself, he does not lose his reward.'

81. A hermit said, 'I would learn rather than teach.' He also said, 'Do not teach too early, or you will have less understanding during the rest of your life.'

82. A hermit was asked, 'What is humility?' He answered, 'Humility is a great work, and a work of God. The way of humility is to undertake bodily labour, and believe yourself a sinner, and make yourself the servant of all.' A brother said, 'What does it mean, to be the servant of all?' He answered, 'To be the servant of all is not to look at the sins of others, always to look at your own sins, and to pray to God without ceasing.'

83. A brother asked a hermit, 'Tell me one thing, that I may keep it and live by it.' He said, 'If you can suffer injury and endure, this is a great thing, it is above all virtues.'

84. A hermit said, 'He who bears scorn and injury and loss with patience, can be saved.'

85. A hermit said, 'Do not take much notice of your abba, and do not often go to see him; for you will get confidence from it, and start to want to be a leader yourself.'

86. A brother took it upon himself to accept any charge made against his community, so that he even accused himself of fornication. Some of the monks, who did not know the truth about his life, began to murmur against him, saying, 'This man does much wickedness and no work.' The abbot, knowing the truth, said to the brothers, 'I would rather have one of his mats with humility than all your mats with pride.' To show the kind of person the monk was in God's sight, he brought all the mats that the monks had made, and the one mat made by the monk of whom they were complaining. He brought a lighted brand, and threw it into the pile of mats. All the mats were burnt except the mat of this monk, which was untouched. The brothers were afraid at the sight, and apologized to him, and thereafter treated him as a father.

87. A hermit was asked how it was that some people said they had seen angels. He answered, 'Blessed is he who always sees his own sins.'

88. A brother learnt that another brother was angry with him, and went to make it up but the other did not open the door of his cell. So he went to a hermit, and told him about it. The hermit said, 'See that

you have no reason, which looks like a just reason, in your heart for blaming your brother: as though you would accuse him and justify yourself, for if so God will not touch his heart to open the door to you. I tell you this: even if he has sinned against you, think in your heart that you have sinned against him; justify your brother rather than yourself and then God will put it into his heart to make peace with you.'

He told him the following story: There were two devout men, living in the world; and after talking with each other they went out and became monks. Wanting to equal the precept in the Gospel, but not according to knowledge, they castrated themselves, as if it was for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The archbishop heard of it and excommunicated them. They believed that they had done what was right, and were indignant with the archbishop saying, 'We castrated ourselves for the kingdom of heaven, and he excommunicates us? Let us go and persuade the archbishop of Jerusalem to contradict him.' They went and told everything to the archbishop of Jerusalem. He said, 'I also excommunicate you.' Even more aggrieved, they went to the archbishop of Antioch, and told him everything: and he excommunicated them likewise. So they said, 'Let us go to see the patriarch at Rome, and he will vindicate us from all these others.' So they went to the Pope of Rome and put before him what the other archbishops had done, saying, 'We have come to you, as you are the head of all.' But he also said to them, 'I also excommunicate you and you are put out of the church.' Then these excommunicated persons had no further excuse and said to each other, 'These bishops defer to each other, and reach agreement because they meet in synods. Let us go to that holy man of God, Epiphanius, the bishop in Cyprus, for he is a prophet, and takes no account of anyone's rank.' As they were approaching his city, he received a revelation about them, and sent to meet them, saying, 'Do not enter this city.' Then they came to their senses and said, 'In fact we are rightly blamed; why are we going on trying to justify ourselves? Even supposing the archbishops excommunicated us unjustly, that cannot be true of this prophet, for he has received a revelation about us.' They blamed themselves greatly for what they had done. So God, who sees men's hearts, revealed to Epiphanius the bishop that they had accepted how guilty they were for the truth's sake. So, of his own initiative he sent and brought them back, and comforted them, and received them back into communion. He wrote to the archbishop of Alexandria about them, saying, 'Receive back your children, for they have done penance in truth.' The hermit who told the story added, 'This is truth and obedience to God's will, to cast oneself before God with confession of sin.' At these words the brother obeyed his words, and went and

knocked on the other monk's door. As soon as the other learnt who it was, he spoke penitently, and opened the door at once; they kissed each other with sincerity and perfect peace was established.

89. Two monks, siblings, lived together, and the devil wanted to cause division between them. The younger one lit a lamp and put it on the lampstand. The demon played a trick and upset the lampstand. The elder brother was angry and beat his younger brother. But the younger apologized and said, 'Be patient with me, brother, and I will light it again.' Suddenly the power of the Lord came and tortured that demon until morning. So the demon told his chief, a pagan priest, what had happened. The pagan priest went out and became a monk; and from the start of his religious life he kept to humility, saying, 'Humility breaks the power of the enemy. I know, for I have heard them saying, "When we tempt the monks, one of them will turn to God in penitence, and that destroys our power." '

1. The brothers said that Gelasius had a parchment book worth eighteen shillings, containing the whole of the Old and New Testaments. The book was put in the church, so that any monk who wanted to could read it. But a travelling monk came to visit the hermit and when he saw the book, he coveted it, stole it, and took it away. The hermit knew who the thief was, but he did not give chase or try to catch him. The thief went to a city and looked for a buyer. He found a man who wanted it, and began by asking sixteen shillings for it. The man, who wished to beat him down, said, 'Let me have it first to show someone and get advice, and then I will pay whatever is the right price.' So the monk gave him the book for this purpose. He took the book to Gelasius to discover whether it was a good bargain and worth this high price. He told Gelasius the price the seller was asking. The hermit said, 'Buy it. It is a good bargain, and worth that much.' So he went back to the seller, but instead of doing as the hermit had told him, he said, 'I showed this book to Gelasius and he told me it was too highly priced and not worth what you said.' The thief said, 'Did the hermit tell you anything else?' He answered: 'Nothing.' Then the thief said, 'I don't want to sell it.' Stricken to the heart, he went to the hermit, did penance, and asked him to take the book back, but he did not want to take it. Then the monk said, 'Unless you take it back, I shan't have peace of mind.' Then the hermit said, 'If you can't have peace of mind unless I take it back, I will do so.' The brother remained with the hermit until his death, and made progress by learning from his patience.

2. At a meeting of the hermits in Cellia, Evagrius made a speech. Then the priest there said, 'Evagrius, we know that if you were in your own country, perhaps you would already be a bishop, ruling over many. Here you are only a pilgrim.' Evagrius was pierced to the heart at these words, but he bent his head calmly and without haste and looked at the ground, then wrote in the dust with his finger, and said, 'Truly, brothers, that is right. But, as it is written, "I have spoken once and I will no more answer" (Job 40:5).'

3. The brothers surrounded John the Short when he was sitting in front of the church, and each of them asked him about their thoughts. When he saw this, another hermit was jealous, and said, 'John, your cup is full of poison.' John answered, 'Yes, abba, it is. But you said

that when you could only see the outside; I wonder what you would say if you saw the inside.'

4. John the Less of the Thebaid, a disciple of Ammon, was said to have lived for twelve years serving a hermit who was ill, sitting on a mat near him. But the hermit was always cross with him, and although John worked a long time for him, he never said, 'May it be well with you.' But when the hermit was on his deathbed, in the presence of the brothers of the place, he held John's hand and said, 'May it be well with you, may it be well with you.' The hermit commended John to the others, saying, 'He is an angel, not a man.'

5. They said of Isidore, the priest in Scetis, that if anyone had a monk who was sick or weak or insolent and wanted to send him away, he would say, 'Bring him to me.' Then he would take him, and cure him by his patience.

6. When Macarius was living in Egypt, one day he came across a man who had brought a donkey to his cell and was stealing his possessions. As though he was a passer-by who did not live there, he went up to the thief and helped him to load the beast, and sent him peaceably on his way, saying to himself, 'We brought nothing into this world (1 Tim. 6:7) but the Lord gave; as He willed, so it is done: blessed be the Lord in all things.'

7. At a meeting of monks in Scetis, the hermits wanted to test Moses. So they poured scorn on him, saying, 'Who is this black man who is here with us?' Moses heard them, but said nothing. When the meeting had dispersed, the monks who had insulted him asked him, 'Weren't you upset inside?' He replied, 'I was upset, and I said nothing.'

8. Paesius, the brother of Poemen, loved one of the monks and Poemen did not like it. So he went and visited Ammonas, and said to him, 'My brother Paesius loves someone else and I don't like it.' Ammonas said to him, 'Poemen, are you still alive? Go and sit in your cell, and think to yourself that you have been in your grave a year already.'

9. Poemen said, 'Whatever hardship comes upon you, it can be overcome by silence.'

10. A brother who was hurt by another brother went to the Theban Sisois and said, 'I want to get back at a brother who has hurt me.' The hermit begged him, 'Don't do that, my son, leave vengeance in the hands of God.' But he said, 'I can't rest till I get my own back.' The hermit said, 'My brother, let us pray.' He stood and said, 'O God, we have no further need of you, for we can take vengeance by ourselves.' The brother heard it and fell at the hermit's feet, saying, 'I won't quarrel with my brother any longer; I beg you to forgive me.'

11. Someone who saw a religious person carrying a corpse on a bed,

said, 'Are you carrying dead men? Go and carry the living.'

12. They said of a monk that the more bitterly anyone injured or assailed him, the more he was well disposed to that person, for he said, 'People like this are a means to cure the faults of serious men. People who make them happy do their souls harm. For it is written, "They that call thee blessed, deceive thee." '

13. Some robbers once came to a hermitage and said, 'We've come to take everything out of your cell.' The hermit said, 'Take whatever you see, my sons.' So they took what they found in the cell, and went away. But they missed a little bag that was hidden in the cell. The hermit picked it up, and ran after them, shouting, 'My sons, you missed this; take it.' They were amazed at his patience and restored everything, and did penance to him. They said to each other, 'Truly this is a man of God.'

14. Some brothers came to a holy hermit who lived in the desert and outside the hermitage they found a boy tending the sheep and using uncouth words. After they had told the hermit their thoughts and profited from his reply, they said, 'Abba, why do you allow those boys to be here, and why don't you order them to stop hurling abuse at each other?' He said, 'Indeed, my brothers, there are days when I want to order them to stop it, but I hold myself back, saying, if I can't put up with this little thing, how shall I put up with a serious temptation, if God ever lets me be so tempted? So I say nothing to them, and try to get into the habit of bearing whatever happens.'

15. It is said that a hermit had a little boy living with him. Seeing him doing something that was not fitting, he said, 'Don't do that,' but the child did not obey him. Seeing that he was disobedient, the hermit washed his hands of his upbringing, and let him do as he liked. For three days the boy kept the door of the room which had the food in it shut and let the hermit go without anything to eat. The hermit did not say, 'Where are you?' or 'What are you doing out there?' A neighbour of the hermit noticed that the boy was late in bringing food so he made a little stew, and passed it to the hermit through a hole in the wall of the cell, and asked him to eat. He said to the hermit, 'Why is that disciple of yours so long away?' The hermit said, 'When he has leisure, he will come back.'

16. There was a story that some philosophers once came to test the monks. One of the monks came by dressed in a fine robe. The philosophers said to him, 'Come here, you.' But he was indignant, and insulted them. Then another monk came by, a good person, a Libyan by race. They said to him, 'Come here, you wicked old monk.' He came to them at once, and they began to hit him, and he turned the other cheek to them. Then the philosophers got up and did homage to

him, saying, 'Here is a monk indeed.' They made him sit down among them and asked him, 'What do you do in this desert other than we do? You fast: and we fast also. You chastise your bodies and so do we. Whatever you do, we do the same.' The monk replied, 'We trust in God's grace, and keep a watch on our thoughts.' They said, 'That is what we cannot do.' They were edified, and let him go.

17. A hermit, who had an experienced disciple, once turned him out in a fit of irritation. The disciple sat down outside to wait and the hermit found him there when he opened the door. So he did penance to him, saying, 'You are my abba now, because your humility and patience have overcome my weakness. Come inside, now you are the old abba, and I am the young disciple; my age must give way to your conduct.'

18. One of the hermits said that he had heard holy men say that there are young men who show old men how to live and they told this story. There was a drunken old hermit, who wove a mat a day, sold it in the next village, and drank as much as he could buy with the money. Then a young monk came to live with him, and he also wove a mat a day. The old hermit took this mat as well, sold it, bought wine with the price of both, and brought back to the monk only a little bread for the evening meal. This went on for three years and the brother said nothing. At the end of three years the monk said to himself, 'I have very little bread here and nothing else, I will go away.' But then he had second thoughts, and said to himself, 'Where can I go? I will stay here, and for God's sake continue with this communal life.' Immediately an angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said, 'Don't go away, we shall come for you tomorrow.' That day the monk begged the old hermit, 'Don't go out, today they will come to take me away.' At the time when the old hermit usually went out to the village, he said to the monk, 'They won't come today, my son, it's late already.' The monk used every argument to show that they would come and even while he was talking, he died in peace. The old hermit wept, and said, 'I'm filled with grief, my son; I have lived negligently for so many years, and you through patience have saved your soul in so short a time.' Thereafter the old hermit became sober and serious.

19. A brother who lived near a great hermit was said to enter his cell from time to time and steal the contents. Though the hermit saw him do so, he did not rebuke him, but struggled to produce more than usual, saying, 'I believe that brother is in need.' While he worked harder than usual he tightened his belt and ate less. When the hermit was on his deathbed, the brothers stood round him. He looked at the thief, and said, 'Come here and touch me.' He grasped his hands and kissed them, saying, 'I thank these hands of yours, my brother; it is because of them that I go into the kingdom of heaven.' The thief was

stricken with remorse and did penance, and he became a true monk,
and followed the example of that great hermit.

1. Antony said, 'Now I no longer fear God, I love him, for love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).'
2. He also said, 'Our life and our death are with our neighbour. If we do good to our neighbour, we do good to God; if we cause our neighbour to stumble, we sin against Christ.'
3. Amoun of Nitria came to Antony, and said to him, 'I see that I have more to suffer than you; how is it that your reputation among men is greater than mine?' Antony said, 'It is because I love God more than you do.'
4. Hilarion once came from Palestine to Antony on the mountain: and Antony said to him, 'Welcome, morning star, for you rise at break of day.' Hilarion said, 'Peace be to you, pillar of light, for you sustain the world.'
5. Mark said to Arsenius, 'Why do you go away from us?' He replied, 'God knows I love you. But I cannot be with God and with men. The countless hosts of angels have only a single will, while men have many wills. So I cannot leave God, and be with men.'
6. Agatho said, 'I tried never to go to sleep while I kept a grievance against anyone. Nor did I let anyone go to sleep while he had a grievance against me.'
7. Once when John was going up from Scetis with other monks, their guide lost his way in the night. The brothers said to John, 'What shall we do, abba, to prevent ourselves from dying in the desert, now that this brother has lost the way?' John said, 'If we say anything to him, he will be upset, so I will pretend I am worn out, and say I can't walk any further, and must stay here till daylight.' He did so and the others said, 'We won't go on either, we'll stay with you here.' They stayed there till dawn, so that they should not blame the monk who had guided them wrongly.
8. Before Poemen went to Egypt, there was a hermit there who was very famous. But when Poemen came up from Scetis with his monks, the people left this hermit in favour of Poemen. The hermit was jealous, and criticized Poemen and his group. When Poemen heard this, he was sorry, and said to his monks, 'What can we do about this hermit? These people have made us suffer, by leaving him and visiting us who are nobody. How can we soothe his mind?' He said to them,

‘Make something to eat, and take a little jug of wine; we will go and eat with him, perhaps we’ll be able to heal his mind.’ So they took the bread that they had made ready, and went to the hermit’s cell. When they knocked, his disciple answered the door, and said, ‘Who are you?’ They said, ‘Tell the abba, “Poemen is here, and he wants to be blessed by you.”’ The disciple told the hermit, who returned the message, ‘Go away, I am busy.’ But they persevered and said, ‘We won’t go away till we have had the hermit’s blessing.’ Seeing their perseverance and their humility, the hermit was stricken with remorse and opened the door to them. They went in and ate with him. While they were having supper, the hermit said, ‘Indeed, I have heard less than the truth about you. I see that you do a hundredfold more than I was told.’ So he became their friend from that moment.

9. Poemen said, ‘Try, so far as you can, to wrong no man, and keep your heart pure towards everyone.’

10. He also said, ‘There is no greater love than that you should lay down your life for your neighbour. When you hear a complaint against you and you struggle with yourself, and do not begin to complain in return, when you bear an injury with patience and do not look for revenge, that is when you lay down your life for your neighbour.’

11. Pambo once happened to be travelling in Egypt with some monks. He saw some men from the world sitting down, and said to them, ‘Get up, give a greeting, and kiss the monks that you may be blessed. For they often talk with God, and their mouths are holy.’

12. Paphnutius is said to have seldom drunk wine but once on a journey he came upon a meeting-place of robbers while they were drinking. The chief of the robber band recognized him and knew that he would not drink wine, but he saw that he was tired out. So he filled a cup with wine, held a naked sword in his other hand, and said, ‘If you don’t drink, I’ll kill you.’ Paphnutius knew that the robber chieftain was trying to obey the commandment of God: and in his desire to help him, he took the cup and drank. Then the robber chieftain did penance before him, and said, ‘I’m sorry, abba, that I grieved you.’ The hermit said to him, ‘I believe that because of this cup my God will have mercy upon you in this world and the next.’ The robber chieftain replied, ‘I believe in God and from now on I’ll harm no one.’ The hermit won over the whole band of robbers, because for God’s sake he let himself fall into their power.

13. Hyperichius said, ‘Snatch your neighbour from his sins, so far as you can, and refrain from condemning him, for God does not reject those who turn to him. Let no evil word about your brother stay in your mind, so that you can say, “Forgive us our debts, as we also

forgive our debtors” (Mt. 7:12).’

14. Two monks were in Cellia. One of them was an old man, and asked the younger, ‘Let’s stay together, my brother.’ The other said, ‘I’m a sinner, and can’t live with you, abba.’ But he begged him, saying, ‘Yes, we can stay together.’ The old man had a pure heart, and the younger did not want him to know that he sometimes fell into lust. Then the old monk said, ‘Let me go away for a week, and we will talk about it again.’ At the end of the week the old man came back, and the younger, to test him, said, ‘I fell into a great temptation during this week, abba. When I went to a village on an errand, I lay with a woman.’ The older man said, ‘Are you penitent?’ The brother said, ‘Yes.’ The old man said, ‘I will carry half the burden of the sin with you.’ Then the brother said, ‘Now I know that we can stay together.’ They remained together till death parted them.

15. One of the fathers said, ‘If anyone asks you for something, and you give it to him, even if you are forced to give it, let your heart go with the gift, as it is written, “If a man forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two” (Matt. 5:41). This means that if you are asked for anything, give it with a willing heart.’

16. It was said that a monk who had made baskets was putting handles on them, when he heard another monk saying nearby, ‘What shall I do? The trader is coming soon and I haven’t got any handles to put on my baskets.’ So he took off the handles he had put on his own baskets, and took them to the nearby monk, and said, ‘I don’t need these; take them and put them on your baskets.’ He helped the brother to finish his baskets, but left his own unfinished.

17. They said that a hermit in Scetis who was ill wanted to eat a little fresh bread. One of the experienced monks heard of it: and he took his cloak, put stale bread into it, went to Egypt, changed the stale bread for fresh, and brought the fresh bread back to the sick hermit. When the brothers saw the fresh bread, they were astonished. The hermit did not want to eat it and said, ‘It is the blood of the brother.’ The others begged him to eat it, saying, ‘For God’s sake eat it, so that his sacrifice is not vain.’ So he ate it.

18. A brother asked a hermit, ‘Suppose there are two monks: one stays quietly in his cell, fasting for six days at a time, laying many hardships on himself: and the other ministers to the sick. Which of them is more pleasing to God?’ He replied, ‘Even if the brother who fasts six days hung himself up by his nose, he wouldn’t be the equal of him who ministers to the sick.’

19. A hermit was asked, ‘How is it that some struggle in their religious life, but do not receive grace like our predecessors?’ He replied, ‘Because then love was the rule, and each one drew his neighbour

upward. Now love is growing cold, and each of us draws his neighbour downward, and so we do not deserve grace.'

20. Three monks once went to harvest, and were given a big area to reap. But the first day one of them became ill, and went back to his cell. One of the two who were left said to the other, 'See here, brother, our brother has fallen ill; you work as hard as you can, and I will do what little extra I can, and we'll trust God that by our sick brother's prayers we'll harvest his part of the field as well as finishing our own part.' So they harvested the whole area which they had been given, and went to receive their pay. Then they called their brother, saying, 'Come on, brother, and take your money.' He said, 'I haven't harvested, so I've earned nothing.' They said to him, 'It was through your prayers that we finished the harvest, so come and take your pay.' There was a fierce argument between them, the one saying, 'I won't take it because I haven't earned it,' the others refusing to accept their pay unless he would take his share. So they went off to a famous hermit, prepared to accept his judgement. The brother who had been sick said to him, 'We three went to earn money by harvesting in a man's field. When we got there, I fell ill on the first day and went back to my cell, and I could not work a single day with them. Now they are forcing me, saying, "Come, brother, take your pay for work you have not done." ' But the other two said: 'The truth is this. When we arrived at the field, we were given a big area to harvest. If there had been three of us, we might with the greatest difficulty have just finished the work. But by the prayers of our brother, the pair of us harvested the field more quickly than three of us would have done. So we are telling him to come and take his pay but he will not.' The hermit marvelled to hear them, and said to one of his monks, 'Ring the bell in the brothers' church to gather them here.' When they had assembled, he said to them, 'Come here, brothers, and hear today a just judgement.' The hermit told them the whole story, and decided that the brother should receive his pay, and do with it whatever he liked. But the brother went away grieved, weeping like a man who has been condemned.

21. A hermit said, 'Our fathers used to visit the cells of new brothers who wanted to lead a solitary life, to see if any of them was tempted by demons and had taken harm from his thoughts. If they found anyone who had taken harm, they brought him to church. A basin was filled with water. Then, after they had all prayed for the one who was suffering temptation, all the monks washed their hands in the basin and then the water was poured upon the tempted brother, and he was at once cleansed.'

22. Two hermits lived together for many years without a quarrel. One said to the other, 'Let's have a quarrel with each other, as other men

do.’ The other answered, ‘I don’t know how a quarrel happens.’ The first said, ‘Look here, I put a brick between us, and I say, “That’s mine.” Then you say, “No, it’s mine.” That is how you begin a quarrel.’ So they put a brick between them, and one of them said, ‘That’s mine.’ The other said, ‘No; it’s mine.’ He answered, ‘Yes, it’s yours. Take it away.’ They were unable to argue with each other.

23. A brother said to a hermit, ‘If I see a monk about whom I have heard that he is guilty of a sin, I cannot make myself invite him into my cell. But if I see a good monk, I bring him in gladly.’ The hermit said, ‘If you do good to a good brother it is nothing to him, but to the other give double charity, for he is sick.’

24. A hermit said, ‘I never wanted work to be useful to me while causing loss to my brother, for I have this hope that what helps my brother will bring fruit to me.’

25. There was a brother who served one of the hermits. The old man’s body happened to be badly hurt, and evil-smelling pus flowed out of the wound. The serving brother thought to himself, ‘I’m getting out of here; I can’t bear the smell of gangrene.’ To control the thought, he took a bowl, washed the wound, and kept the water which he used and whenever he was thirsty, he drank from it. But his thoughts began to trouble him again, saying to him, ‘If you will not go away, at least do not drink this pus.’ The brother struggled with endurance, and went on drinking the water. God saw his charity as he ministered to the old man; and God turned the contaminated liquid into the purest water, and by unseen means healed the old hermit.

18

VISIONS

1. A brother went to the cell of Arsenius in Scetis, and looked in through the window, and saw him like fire from head to foot. (He was a brother worthy to see such sights.) When he knocked, Arsenius came out, and saw the brother standing there amazed, and said to him, 'Have you been knocking long? Did you see anything?' He answered, 'No.' After talking with him, Arsenius sent him on his way.

2. Daniel used to say that Arsenius told him a story, as if he were speaking of some other man, and it went like this: Whilst a certain hermit was sitting in his cell, a voice came to him which said, 'Come here, and I will show you the works of the children of men,' so he got up and went out. The voice led him out and showed him a black man cutting wood; he made up a large bundle and wanted to take it away, but he could not do so. Then instead of making the bundle smaller, he went and cut down some more wood, and added it to the first, and this he did many times. When he had gone on a little further, the voice showed him a man who was standing by a pit drawing up water; he poured it out into a certain hollowed-out place, and when he had poured the water into it, it ran down back into the pit. Again the voice said to him, 'Come, and I will show you other things.' Then he looked, and, behold, there was a temple, and two men on horseback were carrying a piece of wood as wide as the temple between them. They wanted to go in through the door, but the width of the wood did not let them do so, and they would not humble themselves to go in one after his companion to bring it in end-wise, and so they remained outside the door. Now these are the men who bear the yoke of righteousness with boasting, and they will not be humble enough to correct themselves and go in by the humble way of Christ, and therefore they remain outside the kingdom of God. The man who was cutting wood is the man who labours at many sins, and who, instead of repenting and diminishing his sins, adds other wickednesses to them. Now he who was drawing water is the man who does good works, but because other things are mingled in his good works they are lost. It is right for us to be watchful in all we do, lest we toil in vain.

3. Daniel the disciple of Arsenius used to talk also about a hermit in Scetis, saying that he was a great man but simple in the faith, and in his ignorance he thought and said that the bread which we receive is

not in very truth the Body of Christ, but a symbol of His Body. Two of the monks heard what he said but because they knew of his sublime works and labours, they imagined that he had said it in innocence and simple-mindedness; and so they came to him and said unto him, 'Abba, someone told us something that we do not believe; he said that this bread that we receive is not in very truth the Body of Christ, but a mere symbol.' He said to them, 'I said that.' They begged him, saying, 'You mustn't say that, abba; according to what the Catholic Church has handed down to us, even so do we believe, that is to say, this bread is the Body of Christ in very truth, and is not a mere symbol. It is the same as when God took dust from the earth, and made man in His image; just as no one can say that he is not the image of God, so also with the bread of which He said, "This is My Body" is not to be regarded as a merely commemorative thing; we believe that it is indeed the Body of Christ.' The hermit said, 'Unless I can be convinced by the thing itself I will not listen to this.' Then the monks said to him, 'Let us pray to God all week about this mystery, and we believe that He will reveal the truth to us.' The hermit agreed to this with great joy, and each went to his cell. Then the hermit prayed, saying, 'O Lord, you know that it is not out of wickedness that I do not believe, so in order that I may not go astray through ignorance, reveal to me, Lord Jesus Christ, the truth of this mystery.' The other two brothers prayed to God and said, 'Lord Jesus Christ, give this hermit understanding about this mystery, and we believe that he will not be lost.' God heard the prayer of the two monks. When the week was over they came to the church, and the three of them sat down by themselves on one seat, the hermit between the other two. The eyes of their understanding were opened, and when the time of the mysteries arrived, and the bread was laid upon the holy table, there appeared to the three of them as it were a child on the table. Then the priest stretched out his hand to break the bread, and behold the angel of the Lord came down from heaven with a knife in his hand, and he killed the child and pressed out his blood into the cup. When the priest broke off from the bread small pieces, the hermit went forward to receive communion and a piece of living flesh smeared and dripping with blood was given to him. Now when he saw this he was afraid and he cried out loudly, saying, 'Lord, I believe that the bread is Your Body, and that the cup is Your Blood.' At once the flesh that was in his hand became bread, and he took it and gave thanks to God. The brothers said to him, 'God knows the nature of men, and that we are unable to eat living flesh, and so He turneth His Body into bread, and His Blood into wine for those who receive Him in faith.' Then they gave thanks to God for the hermit, because He had not let Satan destroy him, and the three of them went back to their cells joyfully.

4. Daniel told a story of another hermit who used to live in the lower parts of Egypt, and who said in his simplicity that Melchizedek was the Son of God. Now when the blessed man Theophilus, the archbishop of Alexandria, heard of it, he sent a message asking the monks to bring the hermit to him. When he saw him, he realized that he was a man of vision and that every thing that he had asked for God had given him, and that he had only said this out of simplicity. The archbishop dealt with him wisely in the following manner, saying, 'Abba, pray to God for me, because I have begun to think that Melchizedek was the Son of God,' and he added, 'It cannot be true, for the high priest of God was a man. But because I had doubts in my mind about this, I sent for you to pray to God for me that He may reveal the truth of the matter to you.' Then, because the hermit had confidence in the power of prayer, he said to him firmly, 'Wait three days, and I will ask God about this and then I shall be able to tell you who Melchizedek was.' So the hermit went away, and returned after three days, and said to the blessed Archbishop Theophilus, 'Melchizedek was a man.' The Archbishop said unto him, 'How do you know that, abba?' The hermit said, 'God showed me all the Patriarchs, one by one, and they passed before me one after the other, from Adam to Melchizedek, and an angel said to me, "This is Melchizedek." That is indeed how the truth of this matter appeared to me.' The hermit went away, and he himself proclaimed that Melchizedek was a man, and the blessed Theophilus rejoiced greatly.

5. In that place when Ephriam of holy memory was a boy, he saw in sleep, or by revelation, that a vine was planted on his tongue and it grew and filled the whole earth with very great fruitfulness and so all the birds of the air came and ate the fruits of that vine and spread the fruit further.

6. One of the monks saw in a dream a company of angels coming down from heaven by the commandment of God, and one of them held in his hand a scroll that was written on the inside and on the outside, and the angels said to each other, 'Who is fit to be entrusted with this?' Then some of them mentioned one man and others another, and others answered and said, 'Indeed those you mention are holy and righteous, but not sufficiently so to be trusted with this thing.' After they had considered many names of the saints, they finally said, 'No one is fit to be entrusted with this except Ephriam.' Then the hermit who was having this vision saw that they gave the scroll to Ephriam. When he got up in the morning, he heard that they were saying, 'Ephriam is teaching, and words flow from his mouth like water from a fountain.' Then the hermit who had seen the vision realized that whatever he said came from the Holy Spirit.

7. It was said about Zeno that when he was living in Scetis he went

out of his cell at night, going towards the marshes. He spent three days and three nights there wandering at random. At last, tired out, his strength failed him, and he fell down as though dying when suddenly a little child stood before him with bread and a jar of water and said to him, 'Get up, and eat.' He stood up and prayed, thinking that it was an illusion. The child said to him, 'You have done well.' He prayed a second, and then a third time. The child said again, 'You have done well.' Then the hermit got up, took some of the food and ate. The child said to him, 'As far as you have walked, so far are you from your cell. So then, get up and follow me.' Immediately he found himself in his cell. Then the hermit said to the child, 'Come in and let us pray.' But when Zeno went inside, the other had vanished.

8. John said that a hermit saw in a rapture three monks standing on the edge of the sea and a voice came to them from the other side saying, 'Take wings of fire and come to me.' The first two did so and reached the other shore, but the third stayed where he was crying and weeping. Later on wings were given to him also, not of fire but weak and feeble so that he reached the other shore with great difficulty, sometimes in the water, sometimes over it. So it is with the present generation: the wings they are given are not of fire, they are weak and feeble.

9. When Macarius was living in the utter desert he was the only one who lived as a solitary, but lower down there was another desert where several brothers lived. One day he glanced down the road and he saw Satan coming along looking like a man, who passed by Macarius' dwelling. He seemed to be wearing a cotton garment full of holes and a small flask hung at each hole. Macarius said to him, 'Hey, mister, where are you off to?' He said, 'I'm going to stir up the memories of the monks.' The hermit said, 'What are these small flasks for?' He replied, 'I'm taking food for the brethren to taste.' The hermit said, 'So many kinds?' He replied, 'Yes, if a brother doesn't like one sort of food, I offer him another, and if he doesn't like the second any better, I offer him a third; and of all these varieties he'll like one at least.' With these words he went on; Macarius remained watching the road until he saw him coming back again. When he saw the devil, he said to him, 'Good health to you.' The other replied, 'How can I be in good health?' The hermit asked him what he meant, and he replied, 'Because they all opposed me, and no one received me.' Macarius said, 'Ah, so you didn't find any friends down there?' He replied, 'Yes, I have one monk who is a friend down there. He at least obeys me and when he sees me he changes like the wind.' The hermit asked him the name of this monk: 'Theopemptus,' he replied. With these words he went away. Then Macarius got up and went to the desert below his own. When they heard of it the brothers took branches of palm to go

to meet him. Each one got ready, thinking that it was to him that the hermit was coming. But he asked which was the one called Theopemptus, and when he had found out, it was to his cell that he went. Theopemptus received him with joy. When he was alone with him Macarius asked him, 'How are you getting on?' Theopemptus replied, 'Thanks to your prayers, all goes well.' The hermit asked him, 'Don't your thoughts war against you?' He replied: 'Up to now, it's all right,' for he was afraid to admit anything. The hermit said to him, 'Well, after so many years living as an ascetic, and being praised by all, though I am old, the spirit of fornication troubles me.' Theopemptus said, 'As a matter of fact, abba, it is the same for me.' Macarius went on admitting that other thoughts still warred against him, until he had brought him to admit them about himself. Then Macarius said, 'How long do you fast?' He replied, 'Till the ninth hour.' 'Practise fasting till a little later,' he said. 'Meditate on the Gospel and the other Scriptures; if a bad thought comes to you, don't look at it but always look upwards, and the Lord will come at once to your help.' When he had given the brother this rule, Macarius returned to his solitude. He was watching the road once more when he saw the devil, and he said to him, 'Where are you going this time?' He replied, 'To stir up the memories of the brothers,' and he went on his way. When he came back the saint asked him, 'How are the brothers?' He told him that it had gone badly and Macarius asked him why. He replied, 'They are all obdurate, and the worst is the one friend I had who used to obey me. I don't know what has changed him, but he doesn't obey me any more; he's become the most stubborn of them all. So I have decided not to go down there again or at least not for a very long time.' When he had said this he went away and Macarius returned to his cell adoring and thanking God the Saviour.

10. Macarius wanted to encourage the brothers so he said, 'A little while ago a mother came here with her son who was vexed by a devil, and he said to his mother, "Get up, let us go away from here." But she said, "My feet are so bad that I can't walk away." So her son said to her, "I will carry you." I am amazed at the cleverness of the devil, how much he wanted them to flee from this place.'

11. He also told the brothers about the devastation of Scetis. He said, 'When you see cells built beside the swamp know that the desolation of Scetis is near; when you see trees planted there know that it is at the door; when you see boys there take your sheepskins and go away.'

12. It happened that Moses, who lived in Petra, was struggling with the temptation to fornication. Unable to stay any longer in the cell, he went and told Isidore about it. He advised him to return to his cell. But he refused, saying, 'Abba, I cannot.' Then Isidore took Moses out onto the terrace and said to him, 'Look towards the west.' He looked

and saw hordes of demons standing about and making a noise before launching an attack. Then Isidore said to him, 'Look towards the east.' He turned and saw an innumerable multitude of holy angels shining with glory. Isidore said, 'See, these are sent by the Lord to the saints to bring them help, while those in the west fight against them. Those who are with us are more in number than they are against us' (cf. 2 Kgs. 6:16). So Moses gave thanks to God, plucked up courage and returned to his cell.

13. When he was in Scetis, Moses used to say, 'If we keep the commandments of our predecessors I will answer on God's behalf that the barbarians will not come here. But if we do not keep the commandments of God, this place will be devastated.'

14. One day when the brothers were sitting near him, Macarius said to them, 'Look, the barbarians are coming to Scetis today; get up and flee.' They said to him, 'Abba, won't you flee too?' He said to them, 'I've been waiting for many years for this day when the word of Christ will be fulfilled, "They who take the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).' They said to him, 'We will not flee either, we will die with you.' He replied, 'That's nothing to do with me; let each one decide for himself if he will stay or flee.' There were seven brothers there and he said to them, 'Look, the barbarians are nearly at the door,' and they came in and slew them. But one of them fled and hid under a pile of rope and he saw seven crowns coming down and crowning each of them.

15. It was said that Silvanus wanted to go away to Syria but his disciple Mark said to him, 'Abba, I don't want to leave this place, nor will I let you leave. Stay here for three days.' On the third day Mark died.

16. John who had been exiled by the Emperor Marcion, said, 'One day we went into Syria to see Poemen for we wanted to ask him about hardness of heart. But he did not know Greek and we did not have an interpreter. When he saw we were embarrassed, he began to speak in Greek saying, 'The nature of water is soft, the nature of stone is hard; but if a bottle is hung above a stone letting water drip down, it wears away the stone. It is like that with the word of God; it is soft and our heart is hard, but if a man hears the word of God often, it will break open his heart to the fear of God.'

17. Poemen said, 'It is written, "Like as the hart longs for the waterbrooks, so longs my soul for you, O my God" (Ps. 42:1). Indeed, the harts in the desert eat many snakes and when their venom makes them burn with thirst they come to the waters to assuage their burning thirst. It is the same for monks: in the desert, they are burned by the poison of the demons and they long for Saturday and Sunday to

come so that they can go to the springs of water, that is, to the Body and Blood of the Lord, to be purified from the poison of the evil ones.’

18. A brother asked Poemen about the words, ‘Do not render evil for evil’ (1 Thess. 5:15). He said to him, ‘The passions work in four stages: first in the heart, then in the face, third in words, fourth in deeds – and it is in deeds that it is essential not to render evil for evil. If you purify your heart, passion will not show in your expression, but if it does, take care not to speak about it; if you do speak, cut the conversation short in case you render evil for evil.’

19. The holy bishop Basil told this story: In a certain monastery of nuns there was a girl who pretended she was mad and possessed by a devil. The others felt such contempt for her that they never ate with her, which pleased her very much. She took herself to the kitchen and used to perform all the most menial tasks; she was, as the saying is, ‘the sponge of the monastery,’ but in fact she was fulfilling the Scriptures where it says, ‘If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise’ (1 Cor. 3:18). She wore a rag around her head, while all the others had their hair closely cropped and wore cowls, and she used to serve them dressed like that. Not one of the four hundred ever saw her chew in all the years of her life. She never sat down at table or ate a scrap of bread, but she wiped up with a sponge the crumbs from the tables and was satisfied with the scouring from the pots. She was never angry with anyone, nor did she grumble or chatter, either little or much, although she was maltreated, insulted, cursed and loathed. Now an angel appeared to the holy Piterion, the famous anchorite dwelling at Porphyrite and said to him, ‘Why do you think so much of yourself for being pious and dwelling in a place such as this? Do you want to see someone more pious than yourself, a woman? Go to the women’s monastery at Tabennisi and there you will find one with a cloth on her head. She is better than you are. While being knocked about by many she has never let her attention turn from God. But you live here alone and let your attention wander about in cities.’ So Piterion, who had never left his cell, asked those in charge to allow him to enter the monastery of women. They let him in, since he was well on in years and, moreover, had a great reputation. So he went in and insisted upon seeing all of them. The woman he wanted to see did not appear. Finally he said to them, ‘Bring them all to me, for the one I want to see is missing.’ They said, ‘We have a sister in the kitchen who is touched in the head’ (that is what they call afflicted ones). He told them, ‘Bring her to me. Let me see her.’ They went to call her, but she did not answer, either because she had heard what was happening or because it had been revealed to her. They seized her forcibly and told her, ‘The holy Piterion wants to see you’ (for he was famous). When

she came in he saw the rag on her head and, falling down at her feet, he said, 'Bless me!' She too fell down at his feet and said, 'Bless me, my lord.' All the women were amazed at this and said, 'Abba, do not let her insult you. She is touched.' Piterion then spoke to all the women, 'You are the ones who are touched! This woman is an amma (which is what they called spiritual mothers) to both you and me and I pray that I may be counted as worthy as she on the Day of Judgement.' Hearing this, they fell at his feet, confessing various things, one saying how she had poured the leavings of her plate over her; another how she had beaten her with her fists; another how she had blistered her nose. So they confessed various and sundry outrages. After praying for them, he left. After a few days she was unable to bear the praise and honour of the sisters, and all their apologizing was so burdensome to her that she left the monastery. Where she went and where she disappeared to, and how she died, nobody knows.

20. The blessed man Paul the Simple, the disciple of the holy man Antony, used to tell this to the monks: I once went to a certain monastery to visit the brothers for spiritual profit and after talking with them they went as usual into the church to celebrate the holy mysteries. Paul looked at and scrutinized each one of them, so that he might see in what frame of mind he was going in, for he had the gift, which had been given him by God, of looking into the soul of every man, and of knowing what his soul was like, even as we have the power of looking into each other's faces. He saw that everyone was going in with glorious aspect of soul, each face full of light, and that the angel of each was rejoicing in him. The exception was one whose face was sick and afflicted, and whose whole body was in darkness; devils grasped both his hands, and they were lifting him up and dragging him towards them, and they had put a ring in his nose. Paul saw also that the holy angel of this man was a long way from him, and that he followed after him sadly and sorrowfully. When the blessed Paul saw these things he wept and smote himself upon the breast many times, and sitting down outside the church, he wept unceasingly for the man who had appeared to him in this state. Now those who saw Paul were greatly astonished, especially at his swift change from happiness to weeping and tears, and they asked him, entreating and begging him to tell them what he had seen, for they thought that, though he might be angry with them, he would tell them. They besought him also, with one voice, to go into church with them. But Paul drove them away from him, and he would not let himself be persuaded to do this. So he sat outside the church and held his peace, and cried aloud and groaned about that which had appeared to him.

After a short time, when the service was ended, and they were all coming out, Paul scrutinized each one of them carefully, so that he

might see in what manner those whom he had seen go in would come out, and whether it would be with the same countenance as that with which they had gone in, or not. He saw again that man whom he had seen go in, and whose body before he had entered into the church was in darkness, and behold, he came forth from the church with his face full of light, his body white. The devils followed him at a great distance, and his guardian angel was close to him, and walked with him, rejoicing greatly over him. Then the holy man Paul jumped up, and stood there glad and rejoicing, and he cried out and blessed God, saying, ‘Hail to the overflowing mercy of God! Hail to His immeasurable goodness! Hail to His rich treasures! Hail to His pleasure, which is beyond measure!’ Then he ran and stood on a raised platform, and cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Come and see how wonderful are the works of God, and how greatly they are to be admired! Come and see Him who desires that all the children of men should live, and should turn to the knowledge of the truth! Come, let us kneel and worship Him, and say, “He alone is able to forgive sins!”

So all the monks ran to him eagerly to hear what he was saying. When they had all gathered together, the holy man Paul told them the things that he had seen both when they went into the church, and when each of them came out. Then they begged that brother to tell them the reason of that complete change, and of the gladness that God had given him so quickly. The man, being afraid lest he might be rebuked by the blessed Paul, told them the following things about himself, and without any concealment whatsoever. He said, ‘I am a sinful man, and for a long time past, even until today, I lived in lust. When I went into the church, I heard the book of the prophet Isaiah read, that is to say I heard God speaking through him and saying, “Wash, and be clean and remove your evil deeds from before my eyes. Hate the things that are evil, and learn to do good, seek out judgement, and pass righteous sentences upon those who are afflicted. And if your sins be red like scarlet, they shall become white as snow. And if ye are willing to hearken to Me, you shall eat of the good things of the earth” (Is. 1:16–19). Now when I had heard these words from the prophet, that is to say, when I had heard God who was speaking by him, I at once repented sincerely, and sighing in my heart I said to God, “You are the God, who came into the world to make sinners live, therefore show in me the things that you have promised by your prophet, and fulfil them in me, even though I be unworthy of them, for I am a sinner. See, I promise, and I enter into a covenant with you, and I will keep this promise deep in my soul, and will acknowledge it so that from now onwards I will never commit such wickedness again, but I will keep myself far from all iniquity, and I

will serve you from this day onwards with a clean conscience. Therefore, O Master, from this day, and from this hour, accept me, for I am penitent; and I will make supplication to you, and will remove myself from all sin.” Therefore with such promises and covenants as these I came out of church, and I determined in my soul that I would never again do anything that would lessen my fear of Him.’ When the monks heard this they cried out with a loud voice and said to God, ‘O Lord how great are your works. In wisdom have you created all things! (Ps. 104:24).’

Now therefore, Christians, since we know from the holy Scriptures and from divine revelation how great is the grace God gives to those who truly run to Him for refuge and blot out their former sins by repentance, and also how according to His promise He rewards them with good things and neither takes vengeance according to justice nor punishes them for their former sins, let us not despair. For as He promised by the prophet Isaiah, He will cleanse those who have lived in sin and will make them bright and white like clean wool and snow, and glad with the blessings of heaven. Moreover, God asserts by the prophet Ezekiel that he does not desire their destruction when He says, ‘I do not desire the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his evil ways and live (Ezek. 33:11).’

Some Names from the Text

It is not possible to know much about most of the people mentioned in this text beyond what is found here, but these details are gathered from various desert sources about a few though it is always hazardous to attribute details from a saying or story to any specific person.

The stories and sayings were freely exchanged and attributed to various people and set in different locations. Some of the material in this collection is associated with Mount Sinai in Palestine, but the main parts are linked to Egypt. The area of upper Egypt where the great monasteries were located was called the Thebaid. The area called Scetis, also called Nitria (Wadi al-Natrun), was in Lower Egypt, near Alexandria, 40 miles north west of Cairo. Many hermits lived here, within reach of a church for meetings on Saturday to Sunday. Cellia, where more extreme solitude could be experienced, was also here, about twelve miles south of Nitria.

Agathon

As a young man Agathon was a disciple of Poemen in the Thebaid. In Scetis he lived as a solitary and knew the disciples of Arsenius, as well as the monks Macarius, Joseph and Peter. He left Scetis possibly after the first devastation and lived near the Nile.

Amoun of Nitria

One of the great founders of Egyptian monasticism, Amoun was born around 295. He married and lived a celibate life with his wife for eighteen years. In 315 he went to Nitria, where disciples joined him. He died around 337.

Antony the Great

Antony was born in central Egypt around 215, the son of Christian peasant farmers. After their death, around 269, he paid attention when the Gospel was read in church and applied to himself literally the words, 'Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor.' He disposed of his property and undertook a life of solitude and discipline under the guidance of another recluse near his village. Some years later, having put his sister in the care of some nuns, he went to live alone in the utter desert. His reputation for holiness attracted disciples, many of whom settled near him. He died at the age of one hundred and five. An account of his life was written in Greek by Athanasius of Alexandria; this was immediately translated into Latin and circulated widely, and its influence on the Christian world is incalculable.

Arsenius

Arsenius was born in about 360 and lived in Rome. He was a highly educated man

of senatorial rank and good family, a friend of the Emperor Theodosius and his sons Arcadius and Honorius. In 394 he left the city in search of solitude and sailed to Egypt. In Scetis he placed himself under the guidance of John the Dwarf, and eventually became a solitary. He had at least three disciples, Alexander, Zoilus and Daniel. His silence and austerity combined with his learning and rumours of his former magnificent lifestyle made him a perpetual source of wonder to the more simple Coptic monks. He died in 440 after the second devastation of Scetis.

Cassian, John

Cassian was a monk in a monastery in Bethlehem but he left it with his friend Germanus in order to travel in Egypt and study Egyptian monastic ways and teaching at first hand. The material they collected as they toured round the monks and solitaries provided the basis for Cassian's two books, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*, the most influential of all books in forming western monasticism. The fact that he had visited only the Egyptian hermits and not the monasteries gave Western monasticism its special relationship to solitary life. Along with the *Vitae Patrum*, his writings were recommended in the Rule of St Benedict as the best reading for monks. They were written in Latin to help northern monks to follow and adapt the patterns of Egypt when Cassian had returned from his travels and settled near Marseilles. He died in 435.

Ephriam

These stories may refer to the famous Syrian writer and poet, Ephriam the Syrian.

Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyfrus

A man from Palestine who was a disciple of Hilarion in Egypt, Epiphanius then founded a monastery between Jerusalem and Gaza, where he upheld the traditions of Egypt. As a bishop he was concerned with the overthrow of pagan temples and was more in favour of books and learning than other monks in the desert.

Evagrius

One of the great scholars of early monasticism, Evagrius was born in Ibora in Pontus in 345. He was ordained deacon by Gregory of Nazianzus and attended the Synod of Constantinople. In 382 he went to Jerusalem, where he was cared for in a serious illness by the widow-nun Melania. He then lived in Nitria as a disciple of Macarius of Alexandria. One of the most learned of the monks, he was a supporter of the teachings of Origen. A systematizer and transmitter of the theology of the spiritual life of monks, his most famous books were the *Prakticos* and the *Chapters on Prayer*.

Jerome

A father of the church, Jerome lived from about 345 until 420. He was a major scholar and translator of the Bible into Latin.

John Cassian

See Cassian, John

John the Dwarf

Born around 339, John was Egyptian, the son of poor parents in Tese. When he was about eighteen he left his brother and lived in Scetis as a disciple of Amoe. One of the most vivid characters of the desert, he was so famous that his reputation drew many to consult him or live near him. He lived in a cave underground to preserve his solitude. Many sayings are attributed to him, and all point to his central importance in Egypt.

Macarius the Great (the Egyptian)

Macarius was born in Egypt in about 300. He earned his living as a camel driver trading in nitre and then lived as a solitary near a village; he left there after a scandal that had eventually resulted in too much honour being paid to him. One of the pioneers of Scetis, he was renowned for his wisdom and gentleness as well as for his austerity. Like many of the first monks, he moved about the desert and visited Antony the Great as well as other hermits; he attracted many disciples. He died in 390. (The name simply means 'blessed' and was also used by other monks.)

Matrona, Sarah, Syncletica

These are three famous women ascetics whose names appear in this collection. Sarah lived as a solitary, Matrona and Syncletica as the abbesses of monasteries.

Melania

A Roman widow who founded the monastery on the Mount of Olives where Rufinus lived, Melania also lived an ascetic life there. She died in 410 at around seventy years of age. She and Paula both visited the Desert Fathers.

Moses

Moses was a black man from Ethiopia, who was often teased about the colour of his skin. He accepted such humour happily, aware of the affection with which it was offered. He was a released slave who lived as a robber in Egypt until he became a monk as a disciple of Isidore. He was ordained priest and had many disciples. He went to Petra at the end of his life and was killed there with some of his followers by the barbarian invaders.

Paula

Born around 347, Paula was a noble Roman lady, wife and mother of five children. When her husband died she and her daughter Eustochium went to live with Jerome as ascetics at his monastery in Bethlehem. She died in 404.

Poemen (also called Pastor, or Shepherd)

Many stories were told about men of this name, and since it was a common one in Egypt meaning 'shepherd' it is not always clear which Poemen is meant in individual sayings and stories. A famous monk of this name lived in Scetis with his seven brothers; it seems that they left Scetis in 408 and settled in Terenuthis. It is of interest to notice the family ties that connected him, his brothers, his mother and his nephew; they are all mentioned here, a reminder of the close family groups of the Nile valley and the care that the monks needed to exercise in order to transcend them.

Postumianus

This was the name given to a traveller from Tours who told the story of his travels to the biographer of St Martin of Tours.

Rufinus

Born in northern Italy around 345, Rufinus was a monk, writer and translator. He was a friend of Jerome's but they became enemies. Rufinus lived an ascetic life in a monastery on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. He died in 411.

Sarah

See Matrona

Syncletica

See Matrona